An Echo of Passion

by

G. P. LATHROP

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BY

GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP

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AN ECHO OF PASSION.

I.

In the midst of the stilly afternoon, Benjamin Fenn, lying on the grassy side of a hill at Tanford, looking over a low stone wall through the gap between a clump of light-leaved ash-trees and an oak which had gathered in its arms the shade of two centuries, gazed at a distant, mist-like sheet of water resting in the wooded hollow far below. Its mild, humid sparkle was like a memory hidden away from the contact of every-day life, — a place in the past, where once he might have bathed his heart in a pleasant coolness, but which the dense growth of years had since concealed.

"It is strange," he said to his wife, "how that little Swallow Pond makes me think of the past, and yet I never saw it before."

In fact, they had but just come to Tanford, to spend the first vacation which the young chemist, employed by a large manufacturing house, had allowed himself since his marriage, five years before.

"I know what you mean," said she, looking up from her novel. She was nestled prettily on a traveling rug nearer the wall, with one of the lowest oak boughs darting out above and stretching its sharp-outlined leaves like a little roof above her pale golden head, — a sort of votive image, placed there for her husband to worship. "I have those sensations myself, sometimes, and I don't know what to make of them. How do you explain it, Ben? Is n't there something chemical, or physi— physiological about it, or something of that kind?"

A little bird in the neighboring birch-wood gave a loud, bright, astonished whistle at this question, and Mrs. Ethel's husband laughed under his mild reddish beard.

"There 's more or less chemistry in everything," he answered, "and there 's a little of nearly everything in chemistry. But I 'm afraid it does n't account for this."

In his secret mind, his mood was by no means a laughing one. Had his wife, he asked himself, ever really experienced the sensation he had just felt? Hardly possible. Had she the least idea what he was thinking about? Equally impossible. Finally, would he be willing to tell her? To this question he conveniently deferred making any answer. He relapsed, instead, into the delicious dreaming quietude of a few minutes before, — gazing off again at the glimmer of Swallow Pond, with the rough blue mountains beyond; at the clouds which were lazily pulling themselves to pieces in the clear, airy blue above; at the sweet, fresh quiet of the solitary region that surrounded him. Now and then the definite but muffled sound of a woodsman's axe sent its regular "chock! — chock!" from some remote angle of the upland, ceasing again when the wielder rested his arm; and several times the rude tinkle of a cow-bell resounded along the shaven curve of the hill, from a pasture nearer the village. One of the cattle lowed.

"Do you notice, Ethel," Fenn suddenly

asked, "that a slight echo — or perhaps it is a resonance — of that cow's lowing reaches us with the sound, and almost before the direct sound-waves?"

She did not respond at once; and when she did so it was with a slightly injured tone. "No, I have n't," she said.

"I 'm not trying to humbug you," her husband assured her. "It 's a very curious fact, which I never happened to observe before. In fact, I would n't have believed it, if I had n't just heard it."

"I suppose you mean *I* ought to have observed it," said the little saint under the oak-tree, not very sweetly.

"Not at all," said Fenn, quickly. "I thought it would interest you."

"Well, then," proceeded Ethel, with a light, saucy laugh, "tell the cow to tinkle or make some kind of noise again, and I 'll listen."

"Please be serious," he begged, assuming a methodical expression. "This is a thing I can partly explain, if I could n't the other. We must be very near the spot where the

rebound which makes the echo takes place; so we hear some reflected wave of sound just before the original pulse can travel way around the curve of the hill. Am I clear? It 's very singular, though, very queer," he resumed, in surprise at his discovery. "There! Did n't you hear it, just then?"

The cow had lowed a second time.

"I think I did," said his wife. Then she burst into a hearty laugh. "What would that cow think, if she knew her own importance!" she exclaimed. "Do go and thank her, Ben, for her services to science. But no, that will make her too proud; she 'll refuse to give any milk, and will abandon her domestic life, I 'm afraid."

Fenn could n't help laughing, too, but his wife's levity irritated him. "How changeable you are!" he remarked, allowing a mild gloom to replace his smile.

"So are you," said Mrs. Ethel, who also had her reasons for annoyance. "You are always wanting me to be serious, to observe and all that; and then when I try to — as I did just now about that memory of the past, whatever it was — you won't encourage me."

"If that 's the trouble, I 'm very sorry, indeed," the husband declared, with a small sigh, but in almost too business-like a way, as if he were accustomed to these disagreements.

Mrs. Fenn, however, was not to be pacified so easily. "I don't know that I mind that so much," she continued, "but I 'm all out of sorts from reading, or trying to read, this wretched book. I can't imagine why you gave it to me. You 'll never get over thinking I 'm something to be experimented upon."

Fenn glanced carelessly at the volume in her hand. It was a translation of Goethe's Elective Affinities. "Women, nowadays," he said, dryly, "especially the wife of a practical student, a man of serious mind like myself, ought not to shrink from investigation in any direction. I 've expressed the same thing to you a thousand times before."

"Yes, a thousand times too often," retorted Ethel, looking prettier than ever in the flush of anger that lit her soft young features. "I think the book is atrocious, —

unfit to read. It is wicked, and you ought not to have put it into my hands."

"My dear girl, you will never know the world,—you will never be ready to enter general society when I get rich enough for that,—if you don't take the trouble to read what I read, and what other people read, and to be versed in what the world talks of. This is only one of a thousand things, and not the most important, by any means. But you must cultivate a spirit of fearlessness, and make your knowledge wide."

"I don't want to know the world, if this is part of it," declared the young wife, with spirit. In a moment, she announced, with the air of heralding a fatal catastrophe, "I 'm going back to the Institute."

The Institute was a large, nondescript wooden building with an immense colonnade, where they were boarding; so called because in winter it served the purpose of a country academy for young women. In summer it bloomed out as a prosperous hotel and seminary of social gossip, after a short season in the spring when it had no discoverable use of any kind.

"Don't let 's go back yet," Fenn objected, patiently. "It is so beautiful here."

"*You* can stay," said Ethel, still more solemnly, "and I 'll leave the book with you."

She had risen as she spoke, and threw the novel down on the rug. Her face, which was fine and agreeable, had something rustic about it, though serene and luminous in its simplicity. Her eyes were round, rather than oval, above the long, smooth, charmingly modeled cheeks ; and her eyebrows were of that half-uncertain kind, distinct enough, but altering in the degree of darkness at different points, — almost as if they were shadows thrown by a transient light, — and passing off into downiness at the ends, which give such a delicate softness to the brow. As she stood there, with the light hair straying loosely down her neck near her well-turned shoulders, the graceful bow-curve of her lips somewhat constrained by pique, any one examining her critically would have said she was a lovely young woman, more sentimental than accomplished, wanting the polish of a person often in society, but full of character.

Fenn, however, did not examine her critically. He was defending his dignity with an air of coldness; and as the Institute was not far off he assented to her proposition with an austere "Very well. I shall come before long," he added.

Then his wife turned and moved silently up the hill, through the birches.

When people have been married five years, and do not yet understand one another, they must usually either be very happy at the prospect of a continual novelty in their intercourse, or else very miserable. Fenn, though devoted, had decided to be miserable.

He went on looking down into the landscape before him, after being left alone; but it no longer gave him the pleasure he had just been drawing from it. The fatigue of his life in the city seemed to be returning and resuming its hold on him. He had married a penniless girl when himself almost without resources, and had toiled incessantly and ardently, not only for a support, but also to attain as soon as might be to a comparative independence, — for Fenn was ambi-

tious: he longed for a time when he might cut more of a figure in the world; keep a large house; bring brilliant crowds about his wife and himself; enter upon chemical researches which would give him a reputation or professional standing. Though he described himself as a practical man and a person of serious mind, these visions floated continually before him. He had abstracted hundreds of hours from nights, after his commercial analyses and compoundings were over, to carry on experiments of his own, partly for the sake of knowledge, partly for fame, and partly with the aim of devising useful preparations which would make him rich. But, all this time, Ethel and he had not been entirely happy. They theorized about each other, and ended by having very untheoretical and downright quarrels. His devotion to his profession did not altogether please her. No child was born, who might have occupied and aided in developing her, and there was little in his life to soothe the overworked, restless man who had undertaken so much. Finally, he had broken

away from his labors, and brought Ethel to Tanford, among the hills, thinking that they might recover strength and spirits there and make a fresh start. But as he lay here alone under the oak, he began to think the attempt would be a failure. Everything had gone delightfully for two or three days, but now there was a tiff again ; it was always so ; it seemed to him that he should not care any longer for the drowsy rustling of the leaves, the picturesque heights, the billowy farm lands stretching up and down over the broken country, the thick woods and deep, romantic hollows of the place. Even as he looked again at Swallow Pond, in the bottom of the valley, the waters of memory there seemed to be troubled, now, instead of hazily calm and soothing.

What was this that emerged from his past, and haunted him so ?

Three years before his marriage, when roaming over the country as an ardent young naturalist, — geologizing, botanizing, entomologizing, by way of diversion from his specialty, — he had taken it into his head to

go to see a young lady, Miss Evans, whom he had once met in Cambridge, but who lived in the pretty region of Little Falls, in New York. She was a girl of great beauty, and sang (as people said) divinely. This voice of hers, which he had heard, returned to him at times, — a clear, vibrating strain, which startled him by ringing in his ears as if it were actually present, even in the quietest, most deserted places, or amid the noise of streets. He seldom thought of her beauty, or incidentally, if at all. It was the sweetness of her tones that enthralled him. And when I say enthralled, I don't mean that there was any touch of love in the spell which she threw over him. He could have listened to her voice for hours, and followed it for unlimited distances; but that was all he cared for in her. Yet the recollection of its melody had such power over him that he gradually came to rate it among the necessities of his future that he should hear her sing again. This made it easy to yield to the fancy of going to Little Falls. As he thought it over, now, the whole thing

brought a smile to his lips; yet it was a half-uneasy smile. Well, she had married, since, and was widowed. It was a Virginian whom she had chosen, with one of those mellow Southern names. Eulow, — that was the name. Fenn tried to think of her wonderful voice uttering these syllables, and found that his imagination reproduced the tone vividly.

On arriving at her father's house, a stately old country home, like many in that rich tract of the Mohawk Valley, the young man, who had n't much tact, and was led by habits of precise thought to be very explicit always, conceived an astounding plan of action.

"I dare say you never expected to see me here," he began, when Miss Evans was seated before him. "I have come to hear you sing."

"All the way from Boston?" she queried, with a laughing doubt in her dark eyes. And he fancied that her rich color grew more vivacious.

He rapidly explained the situation, with what might have been a misleading ardor.

It was only his natural eagerness, a little heightened.

At this moment her father entered; an elderly, nervous gentleman, with an old-fashioned collar much crumpled under his loose curling hair, and a pair of Lille gloves only half drawn on. An invitation to Fenn to spend several days with them immediately followed.

"You can sing more than once for him, in that way, Anice," said her father.

"Perhaps once will be enough," she answered. "I dare say Mr. Fenn has been adding qualities to my voice, in his fancy, that it never had."

"I can soon tell whether that's so or not," said he, with unconscious bluntness.

Anice sang two or three songs, and the young man sat with his reddish beard pointing sidewise and upward, his strong hands pressed upon his chair, the nails all alive with the pink of his vigorous blood, and a light of keen rapture on his handsome, sturdy face.

"It has not lost a bit; it has gained in power," he affirmed, decisively, at the end

Anice very naturally was pleased; a fact which she endeavored to conceal by poking fun at the young enthusiast, in various ways; while Mr. Evans, seeing nothing dangerous in the posture of affairs, thought Fenn an excellent youth. The scientific student, however, had considered everything beforehand, and, as I have said, determined to be explicit. The next morning Miss Evans took him out for a walk about the farm, and he seized this opportunity, while they were skirting the dewy fields, to explain himself.

"It has occurred to me," he said, rather gently, "that you might not exactly understand my coming here, this way. You might think there was something underneath it. But my motive was just what I told you yesterday. I almost worship your voice, but I 'm not a fellow with much sentiment, and I have n't any idea of making love to you. I know it is n't usual to speak plainly about these things," he continued rapidly, seeing a mixed, semi-quizzical look in her face, "but I want to enjoy your singing and your friendship in a fair, straightforward way, and it

seemed to me a great deal better to avoid any embarrassments" —

Just here he found that he had precipitated the embarrassment he wished to avoid, and it tied his tongue. But Anice came to his relief with a laugh.

"Did you think that idea would ever have entered my head, about you?" she demanded, giving a fine edge to the last word that cut him a trifle, in spite of her gay good-feeling. "No, Mr. Fenn, there won't be any embarrassment at all. We shall be good friends, just as you propose; and since I 'm very fond of singing, I shall give you as much music as you like, while you stay."

Fenn indulged the absurd belief that everything had now been nicely arranged; but when he went to bed that night he discovered that he was in a mood of serious discomfort. The voice which had always hitherto been a pleasure of the ear and the intellect had that day stirred his blood, had thrilled his heart. All his senses were suddenly open to Miss Evans's darkly moving beauty, and he could even fancy how he

might be in love with her. The very act of definitely putting her out of the range of sentiment had excited this unexpected impulse to think of her in the nearer way, or at least had made him long for the liberty so to think of her.

"What an ass I have been!" he muttered, as he lay awake in the darkness, gazing at the square of stars framed by his window, with this new current of warm delight at her loveliness stirring in his veins. "I have put myself under a sort of bond, now, not to make any approach to admiring her in this way, and my visit is spoiled."

Possibly Anice suspected this revulsion on his part. At all events, she employed — whether voluntarily or not — all the power of her personal presence over him, during the succeeding days. In the open hospitality and free relation that brought them together there was opportunity enough for him to see her in various phases, and the charm of her dark hair, her glowing eyes, and vigorous grace of action grew upon him swiftly, as he watched her at the piano, in their walks, or

on their drives with the retired lawyer, her father. One afternoon there was a picnic near the river, with some neighbors, at which Fenn was chagrined by observing the attention paid her by a young railroad officer from Albany. The last day that he remained with them was a Sunday; and as he sat with Mr. Evans and Anice in their pew in the ugly church, with the warm breathing of the breeze in the horse-chestnut trees heard through the open windows, he fancied that he must do something, say something, before going away, which should annul the effect of his horrible blunder. He was not sure that he might not even make a move to put himself in the light of a captive heart. At least he might open a correspondence with her.

But the young mistress of song gave him no chance; not the least opening for a new explanation. She had taken him at his word, and treated him with a frankness and seeming directness that were more fatally in his way than the most ingenious reserve and coyness could have been; and she made it impossible for him to depart otherwise than

as an eccentric friend, or a cousin from whom nothing in the way of tender regard could possibly be looked for.

"I have got precisely what I bargained for," he said to himself, as the train bore him away; "and yet I feel that I 've been cheated."

For a time he wondered whether an approach by letter would be successful, and whether, after all, that was not what Miss Evans suspected him of intending. What kept him thinking about her was this inability to fathom her mode of taking him. He was almost ready to stake his future for the sake of finding out whether there was a laugh at the bottom of her heart when she thought of him, or something more flattering. Even at this moment of recalling the affair, "There was always mystery in Anice," he said to himself. "Every woman is something of a mystery; but she had a special mystery within that of her sex. How odd it would have been, if I had followed out that romance!" But he had not done so. A year later he met Ethel, and then he married her. Anice

and her voice became a dream, a vagary which had lost its hold upon him. Yet did he not sometimes remember with a strange thrill how, two nights before he saw her last, she had sung Adelaïde, with the moonlight breaking through the vine along the veranda and mingling with those insidiously passionate and touching strains?

As he was reminding himself of this, Fenn started up from the grass and listened, with a singular expression, almost of fright. He could have sworn that the ghostly voice of eight years ago was floating through the air. First, a faint, momentary hum, then the full voice, freighted with mystic pathos, came around the heavy mass of the hill, from some spot not a quarter of a mile away.

Yes; it was true! The peculiar echo he had noticed had come to him first, like a sound made faint by the years; and then the voice rang out softly. It was Adelaïde. The same tones were embodying the song. Fenn was sure he could not be mistaken in their identity; and that Anice Evans — Anice Eulow — had by some chance drifted to Tan-

ford, and was at that instant so near him that he could hear her singing. The voice and the blended echo went on, like the past and present mingling in his thoughts. Trembling, he could not tell why, Fenn threw himself upon the ground once more, and waited in a kind of trance until the breaking melody ceased.

II.

For a moment or two he listened, to see if it would recommence. There was no further sound. He rose; he tried to persuade himself that the whole thing had been an hallucination. But this, again, made him shake his head; and, gathering up mechanically the rug and the book which had been left by his wife, he climbed over the wall, and set off across the field, in the direction of the songstress's voice, as if obeying it. The sun was getting low, and birds began to dart about above his head; the cows went on tinkling their bells in a discontented, drowsy manner. Fenn scarcely knew which way his steps were taking him, except that he was moving around the hill. Presently he came to a farm-house, which appeared to be driven into the steep slope like the head or bill of some creature clinging there, with a huge barn spread out disdainfully, tail-like, to-

wards the landscape. The house had vines and bushes about it, giving it a fresh and pleasant air; but there was nothing to indicate that this was the place from which the song had come. The chemist paused, nevertheless, and while he was observing the lifeless buildings a figure suddenly emerged from the barn, — a man carrying a hoe. Fenn saw that he grasped it in a hand only partly thrust into a silk glove; then the crumpled stock and tumbled hair at the man's neck began to look familiar. It was Mr. Evans.

The young man did not hasten up to intercept him. On the contrary, he allowed the lawyer to disappear around the corner of the barn, on some errand of amateur agriculture. Fenn then moved forward with an assured step towards the japonica clump that rose stiffly by the side door of the dwelling. Behind the hedge of branch and leaf that guarded the wide porch there, he felt sure he should find Anice Eulow; and in another moment he stood face to face with her.

"Did n't I hear you singing?" he asked, taking off his hat, and bending forward to

look at her, with an odd appearance of having just discovered a new creature whose attributes he did n't wholly understand.

She rose in astonishment from the hammock where she sat languidly half reclining.

"Is it possible? Is it you, Mr. Fenn?" In an instant her manner had melted into easy friendliness, like that of the days at Little Falls, as she went on: "You are as abrupt as ever, I see. It was eight — oh, it was *very* long ago you heard me singing. You speak as if a few weeks had passed."

She offered him her hand, at the same time, and he took it; noticing as he did so that her beauty had deepened and expanded wonderfully since he had seen her last, — a beauty which, being concentrated upon no one object, seemed to exhale itself in a wasted richness about her, like the perfume of violets, as she stirred, and spoke, and looked at him.

"No, I 'm sure it was a few moments ago," he said, earnestly. "I was half-way round the hill. I was sitting there — Yes,

a few moments, and yet it is the same song of years ago."

"Adelaïde?" she asked, with a soft, melancholy questioning of the eyebrows. And as she said it one would have thought her very eyes might sing.

Fenn made a silent affirmation.

"Ah, yes," she returned, "I had just come from the piano a moment, when you appeared there. Really, you were almost too like a ghost, Mr. Fenn. And so you remembered? How curious! — you remembered that that was the song."

He was surprised that she should suspect him of being able to forget it. Reflecting, in a moment, that she had herself named the melody, he asked, with the old bluntness, which seemed to have returned to plague him, "Remembered? Of course. And you did, did n't you?"

She avoided his glance, and, while apparently hearing him and preparing to answer, glided into reverie, from which she again started. "How absurd this is, to be talking of old songs, when we meet here as friends

that might almost have forgotten each other! You have n't allowed me a single question about yourself, yet; and then — why, one would think you would ask a few about *me.*" She said this with such a light, friendly, innocent coquettishness that the young man drew in a new breath of surprise and pleasure, and smiled. She had resumed her graceful pose in the hammock.

"I never thought of that," he said. "I don't seem to have any questions. I know you were married, and that your name is Mrs. Eulow, but I always think of you as Anice Evans. You know that 's natural enough; but you must n't imagine I was dull and unsympathetic about what was happening to you. I had been hoping I should meet your husband, some time; and then, when I heard he was dead" —

He hesitated, as if fearing that he had touched a mournful chord too harshly.

"Yes, it was very sudden and strange. How little we thought or knew of our lives, you and I, when you came up to the Mohawk to see me!" murmured Mrs. Eulow.

"What has impressed me most," he replied, "was the degree of feeling one person could have for another, in such a sorrow, without being able to express it. I could n't write to you. I hardly thought I knew you well enough, or that you remembered me enough, to make it acceptable."

His sincerity of manner roused a fresh interest in Mrs. Eulow. For men and women who have been apart since the dawn of maturity to meet thus, after entering separate careers and suffering alteration, is like what we can fancy an encounter would be, in some other world, of two persons who had known each other in this. They are the same, yet obscurely different. The definiteness of their former relation is gone; an uncertainty takes its place, which may result in attraction, repulsion, or indifference. But in the first moments there is always a pleasant excitement. Fenn and Mrs. Eulow were both occupied with this, and little spaces of silence broke their conversation, during which a singular, vague communion of thoughts would establish itself.

"And you had found we were here, — father and I?" she resumed, as if continuing this mute interchange.

"Not until I heard you sing. I caught sight of your father as I came towards the house. I have n't the least idea what brought you here; yet, after the first instant of surprise, it seemed perfectly natural. The fact is," — Fenn bent his head and brushed his fingers together, with a nervous laugh, but went on boldly, as if there could be nothing compromising in the announcement, — "I happened to be thinking about you, just before your voice reached me."

Mrs. Eulow's eyes flashed, softly, in the gathering dimness of the porch. Or was it a wandering spark of the sunset, which at this moment began to fill the liquid air?

"And now please to account for yourself," the widow demanded gayly. "'What have been your adventures?' as they used to say, in the old romances. Why should you have come to Tanford, any more than I? Your wife is with you, of course." She glanced at the rug and the book, silent witnesses of Ethel's existence.

Fenn, too, looked at these objects, with a foolish fear that they might reveal the cause of his wife's not being present. "Oh, yes," he said. "We are staying in Tanford, — up at the Institute, if you 've heard of that. We shall be here a number of weeks."

"I shall be so glad to see her," Anice assured him. "And your children. Oh — have you children?"

Fenn felt a burning sensation in his eyes. The suddenness of this had brought a bitter moisture to them, which he was wholly unused to. "No," he answered, in a strong, deep voice; "Ethel and I have only each other."

"Ah, think how much more that is than I have!" exclaimed Mrs. Eulow, with a swift tenderness of sympathy, a genuineness of tact, which went to his heart. "I hope Mrs. Fenn and I shall have some nice talks and drives together. Papa and I hired this whole house for the summer, from a good farmer who has mortgaged his very bones, I believe; and he goes on with the farm, but lives in another house, so we are very comfortable.

But you have more people to see at your Institute."

"Yes. We don't know many of them, though, and summer boarders don't always show to advantage."

"Just the thing! I was hoping it would be so!" cried Mrs. Eulow. "Now you and Mrs. Fenn will come down often. And I have a good saddle horse."

"I don't think Ethel rides," said Fenn, awkwardly.

"But she reads. You won't think me too curious, will you, if I ask what that book is?" she went on, pointing to the gray muslin-covered volume, which he had laid on a chair. "I'm always so interested in what people are reading."

He took it up and handed it to her, rather reluctantly. "I must say, Ethel does n't like it."

Mrs. Eulow read the title. "Nor I. Do you?" Her tone was quite simple and direct.

"Oh, it's worth while reading. It's curious," said Fenn.

"Yes; but that 's all. I don't detest Goethe, as so many people do," she explained. "But then this story is so cold and mechanical. It chills you, like a talking automaton. His mind must have been a strange one, I think, — a sort of stoniness in it. The idea of a poet making a cold theory of these things, — a chemical law of human passions! You can't put down mysteries in terms of arithmetic."

"I think you 're right, no doubt," said Fenn. "Love and science don't always go well together." And he fell to thinking whether this remark had not a special bearing on his life.

"So you see, Mrs. Fenn and I shall agree, exactly."

"You remind me that I must go," he said, making haste to get up from his chair. "The sunset is almost gone over Sheep's Back."

"But you must speak to papa. How queer that I did n't think of calling him! All this is such a surprise." She rose, returning him the book as she moved towards the steps, with a lingering movement of the arm that

produced an effect as if she were dropping her hand gently into his, although she was evidently unconscious of this. His own fingers closed upon the volume, but his eyes watched the hand, — white, firm, and beautiful, yet with a sadness, he chose to think, in all its motions and even its contour.

She called Mr. Evans, in her sweet voice, which retained all its vernal strength. "I don't believe he will hear me," she said, after waiting; and Fenn wondered if any one else could be so deaf.

"Shall we go and find him?" he suggested.

"Oh, yes; and then I will show you my horse, — just like old times," said Mrs. Eulow, taking up her noiseless cool black skirt in one of those sad hands, and descending the steps.

Finding the barn open and deserted, they went in. The farther end gave upon the rugged, woody valley, which fell away almost cavernously in the gathering twilight, showing the pond far below, gleaming faintly like a pearl from the depths. Over Sheep's Back

mountain the sunset was slowly dissolving into the mysterious green pallor of a lingering summer evening. Without a word, they traced their way to the wide doors, and looked out at the landscape. "Ah, how peaceful and fresh it is here!" she sighed at last.

They had quite forgotten Mr. Evans.

A horse was whinnying and pawing in one of the stalls, and this sound recalled her. "Poor Star!" she said. "He knows I'm here. Shall we go back and look at him? I can't conceive where father is; but you know how restless he was, — always half doing things, and trying to feel very busy. He's just the same now, and greatly agitated just at present about the badness of your New England farming."

So they went in and saw Star, a fine bay stallion, who put his nose down to be stroked by his mistress. She fed him with hay, through the crib; and then Fenn also patted him on the nose. As he did so, his usually firm hand trembled. He drew it away quickly.

"Well, I must give up seeing Mr. Evans to-night," he said abruptly, almost with irritation. "Please remember me very warmly to him, Mrs. Eulow."

He was about to go by way of the house; but, remembering that the road wound around just below the barn, he turned in that direction again. "Good-night," he said, but was afraid to offer his treacherous hand.

"Good-night, Mr. Fenn. Father will be so glad to hear of your being here, I'm sure." She accompanied him to the door; but he leaped down at once to the bank below. Then he turned.

"You must come up to the Institute. Ethel will be greatly pleased."

"I shall come to-morrow," said Mrs. Eulow, in her gentlest tone, "if she will let me. Tell her how much I'm looking forward to it."

He waved another farewell, with his hat, and walked briskly up the road.

When he had got as far as the bend towards the village, an irresistible desire to look around seized him. Anice was no longer

in the wide door-way. He was relieved, yet disappointed. "But why," he asked himself, "should I feel either way about it? She could n't possibly stand there gazing after me. What sense would there be in it?" Nevertheless, he sat down on the road-bank, a little farther on, and mused. He pretended to himself that he wanted to cut a walking-stick, and selected a straight wild cherry, which he attacked vigorously; and then, having severed it, he held it idly in his hand. If he had been able to pronounce upon the feeling with which he had looked up at Anice Eulow, when he left her, he would have known that it was not — as he believed — a wave of compassion for her loneliness and possible suffering that had beaten against his heart, but a sudden pity for himself because he could not touch her, could not raise her hand to his lips or press them upon her forehead. To what end? So far was he from any thought of profanation that he did not at the moment even suspect the real scope of that dim longing which her deep and friendly eyes had wakened in him. . . .

He gave up the attempt to unravel his confused reverie; lopped a few twigs from the cherry; threw it away, and took up the burden of the rug and the book. But before he reached the hotel he had come to this conclusion: "It is not in Anice that the mystery is which I was thinking of, just now. It must be in me. She is a sweet, natural, true-hearted woman; that 's all. It 's very simple."

"I was getting very anxious about you," said his wife, as he stepped within the big colonnade, which was adorned by a number of listless figures, in chairs or promenading, among them being two or three young men in straw hats, seated with piratical recklessness on the railings at each end. "Have you been under the oak, all this time?"

"No; but it 's hard saying what I have n't done. I 've visited a house and a barn, taken a new walk, cut a cane, and met a friend whom I had n't seen for years."

"Do I know his name?" asked Ethel, as they went through the hall to the tea-room. The angry ripple of their small dispute had passed away completely.

"It 's not my luck that she should be a man," said Fenn. "But you will have a delightful companion, now, Ethel. It 's Mrs. Eulow. I don't think I 've ever mentioned her to you, have I? Did you ever hear me speak of her singing?"

"No. At least I don't remember it. But I hope she 'll sing for us here, if she 's going to stay."

The tea-room, which had about it the desolateness of a recent battle-field, still contained one tardy occupant, — a collegian with bent shoulders, frouzy hair, and eye-glasses, whose lean awkwardness made him look like a harmful bug with prominent vitreous eyes, suddenly stiffened in alcohol so that he could n't unbend. His rigid presence restrained their conversation for a few moments, and gave Fenn time to reflect with satisfaction upon his wife's lenient mode of accepting his absence and of treating his friend the widow as a matter of course. Whatever else they had passed through, these companions had never yet been vexed by even the most evanescent fear that they

were not bound up in one another ; and the man, remembering this, was at once aware that a flaw in their trust at this particular moment would be inopportune and, in some indirect way not clear to him, exceedingly perilous. When the noxious student had at last carried himself stiffly out of the room, Fenn answered Ethel's questions about Anice with great vivacity and a steady conscience.

"It 's very simple," Fenn had informed himself. But when, before retiring to rest, he went out alone upon the balustraded roof of the colonnade, and stood for a moment under the warm, thick stars, he suffered a renewed palpitation of those wayward ardors which had first thrilled him when looking at the starry field through his window in the old Evans home. What did this mean? He told himself that it was wrong; more than that, it was unreal, impossible. He was sure that he loved his wife as devoutly as ever. The wedded affection of five years could not waver and yield in an afternoon to the mere resuscitation of a chimera. And yet here were these old emotions pushing themselves

upward and blossoming again like flowers in an early spring. This same fancy of the flowers brought him some relief; for at least, he argued, he was no more responsible for any reviving sentiment than he was for the blossoms of spring. Every season must bring back its old associations, and at any moment there might float across his heart some wild fragrance of a forgotten passion, like that of the hidden arbutus. Acquitting himself thus with a simile, he went off to his room.

Sleep and the malicious frankness of dreams had something else in store for him. Far on towards dawn he found himself standing where the solid ground fell away into darkness and mist, in the lower spaces of which he discerned a pearl of fabulous size. It appeared to him that he plunged downward to secure it, and when he rose again to where he had been standing, Anice Eulow was beside him.

III.

THERE can be few positions more comfortless and provoking for a man than to be present at the first meeting of two women in whom he is deeply interested, feeling that he must observe what impression they are making on each other. Fenn began to see this before the expected call took place. Yet why should he pay any heed to their mutual impressions? He was satisfied with his wife, was he not? And the fact of his having chosen her ought alone to command the respect of any other woman who professed a friendship for him. Then, again, if Ethel should n't happen to like Mrs. Eulow, why need that prevent his rejoicing as much as ever in his old friend? This kind of reasoning was all very well; but it did not allay his discomfort. Lay our plan of action never so nicely, determine our relations to people with what independence we will, industrious

fancy will break in and demolish in a single hour the whole structure. Fancy is perpetually playing with things as they are, and arranging them as they ought to be; and by and by this play is found to be the most palpable and terribly effective earnest.

The first interview, however, passed off easily enough. Mr. Evans was greatly exhilarated at meeting again the stalwart enthusiast about his daughter's singing; the two women glided together without any visible shock, Mrs. Eulow's gloved hand clasping Ethel's bare and unsophisticated little fingers with soft cordiality.

"We came early," said the widow at length, breaking through the busy web of miscellaneous talk, "for two reasons: we thought we should be more likely to find you; and then father wants you both to come and take an early dinner with us, at the farm-house."

Ethel's round eyes brightened, and she and her husband settled the thing by a glance.

"You will come, then?" said Mrs. Eulow, with a smile that would have convinced the most hardened social skeptic.

"We will all walk down together, if you say so," put in her father.

"Can you get ready, Ethel?" Fenn asked, with a singular desire to appear indifferent.

His wife rose. "It 's only putting on a bonnet and something," she said; and then she turned to Anice. "Would you like to see our beautiful apartment? Will you come up?" she suggested.

Fenn was afraid this was too familiar; but country boarding makes its own standard of manners, and besides Anice assented so promptly that the movement was spontaneous. As they went out, he saw that it was an excellent chance: it put him wholly at ease. It is generally a good sign for newly acquainted women to run off together, in this way. What can the mysterious initiation be, the informal freemasonry by which, with the aid of a looking-glass and a little millinery and a few aimless sentences, they establish an understanding, when closeted in a room by themselves? I should hardly dare to ask, and I don't believe they could explain; but if they come down looking highly pleased

with themselves, you may be sure the rite has succeeded. It was so in this instance. Neither Anice nor Ethel would be likely to deploy the least "gush;" the widow made no claim upon the wife on the score of old acquaintance with her husband, and Ethel did not offer the smallest pretense of having frequently heard of Mrs. Eulow, because in fact she never had heard of her until the day before, and contented herself with suppression of that truth. But as they came out from the room, and were about to descend the bleak, uncarpeted stairs, Mrs. Eulow put her arm for an instant around her companion's girlish figure, and Ethel gave her a quick affectionate glance before the pressure was withdrawn again; not a syllable being uttered on either side.

The little wife looked wonderfully pretty in her cream-tinted créplisse with bands of black lace coming down over the front. She carried a brilliant Japanese sunshade, and walked in advance with Mr. Evans.

"You are very happy to have found such a wife," said Mrs. Eulow, whom Fenn was

attending. "You must allow me to say that much."

"I 'm glad you agree with me," he answered, hardly knowing what to say. Nothing is more welcome to a man than a compliment upon his wife, and yet when it comes from another woman he is embarrassed by not being able to utter all that he feels. At this moment, notwithstanding those freaks of sentiment which had troubled him the day before, Benjamin Fenn worshiped Ethel, and would have felt a fierce indignation at any doubt cast upon his loyalty to her.

Yet as he moved along side by side with Anice, he was thinking continually about the husband whom he had never seen. He had tried to sound her father on the subject, in the few moments they had had alone ; but he fancied the old gentleman did not want to talk about Eulow. "What a pity that I never saw your husband!" he now said abruptly.

A slight cloud crossed her face. "You may think it strange," she said, "but I 'm not certain that you would have liked him. He was so different."

"From me, you mean? Or from you?"

"Both," was the reply, after a slight hesitation. Anice began to see her mistake in saying too much.

"I 'm afraid I have done wrong to talk of it," said he. "The thought crossed me, and I 'm forever thinking aloud. But as to difference, you and I are a good deal unlike, and yet we have been good friends, when we knew each other."

"When we *knew?* You speak as if it were all over." She half smiled, yet as she turned her eyes towards his, under the shade of her parasol, there was an intensity in them, unexpected to both.

"Oh, no," he assured her. "That was a careless phrase. I hope we are only beginning."

The tone was that of compliment, and he, too, smiled. But neither of them could forget that swift exchange of glances which revealed something under the words.

"Don't let us talk of those times," she said, with the first trace of confusion she had betrayed. "At least, not of what we have

just spoken about. I like to remember your coming to Little Falls; but you must take me now just as I am. When one has suffered, and everything has changed, it is pleasant to meet an old acquaintance, and have it go on as if nothing had happened."

Again she seemed to have said too much, or to have said what might bear too much meaning. But it could n't be helped.

"Every one suffers," said Fenn, unguardedly. Then, after an instant, "And do I seem the same to you that I used to?"

"Almost exactly," returned the widow. The announcement seemed to give her nearly as much pleasure as it gave him. Her color was rising, from the exercise perhaps; and her eyes beamed.

Fenn glanced from her to his wife, and unconsciously compared them. Ethel was like some gay tropical bird, in her light dress and bright colors. With Anice, the black walking garb touched here and there with dark violet, though wrought with not a little elegance, was a mere accompaniment to her superb figure and the face so gentle but com-

manding. They were silent for some time, until Fenn, in his rapid, investigating way, declared: "I smell English violets. Don't I?"

"Do you want me to deny it?" asked Anice, laughing, and quite at ease again.

He answered seriously and in surprise: "No. Why?"

"I thought you were determined to have an argument, you began so vigorously," said she, still with humor. "Besides, it 's a maxim, is n't it, for men of science to deny until a thing is proved? — and I might supply the denial, at any rate."

"But really," he resumed, "I felt sure of it. Perhaps you use violet for a perfume."

"I don't think I 'm bound to tell you that," she returned. "But I will, since you 're so puzzled."

"Then that 's the explanation. You do use it."

"No."

He appeared greatly mystified, and she made no secret of enjoying his bewilderment.

"You have violet ribbon, at any rate," he presently discovered, with amusing satisfaction, after carefully surveying her.

"Yes; but it 's not so life-like as to have a perfume."

"Well, I give it up, then," said Fenn, in assumed despair. "The color is an aniline dye. But even that does n't explain my perfume. I must have imagined it, I suppose."

And they had now arrived at the farmhouse, where Mr. Evans and Ethel, who had been chatting all the way with much animation, were waiting for them. The dinner, taken in a room which looked out on Sheep's Back and the valley, was simple but remarkably good; it was evident from all the appointments that father and daughter had plenty of money, and they were so far lifted above the average American lot as to have good servants. Mr. Evans even opened a bottle of champagne, for which the circumstance of his having got it extraordinarily cheap served as an indirect apology.

"When Anice and I went abroad with Eulow for his health — it did n't avail after

all, poor fellow! — we stopped one day at a little village in the Champagne country, and" —

His daughter here interrupted, by talking to Fenn, possibly not liking the odd conjunction of Eulow's death and a special importation of champagne, a case of which had been brought with them for summer use; so her father continued his narrative to Ethel. There was no interruption of harmony, however, and the conversation progressed very entertainingly. As they were finishing dessert, and the young man, lifting his glass, was sipping from it slowly and gazing across the bowl at the hazy hill outside, Mrs. Eulow made some allusion to the garden at Little Falls, — "close by where the bed of English violets was, you remember."

"That 's it!" exclaimed Fenn, setting down the glass so sharply as to risk its stem. "I had forgotten all about it. But when I met you, last evening, a kind of reminiscence must have come to me: I know I thought there was a violet perfume, then.

Ah, yes, that explains it. It was association."

There was a light, mischievous sparkle in Mrs. Eulow's eyes, as if she had half suspected the cause of his hallucination about the violets, and had purposely brought out the explanation; but she smiled with him at the discovery. Ethel and Mr. Evans, noticing the excitement, were allowed a share in it; Anice giving the details with a charming grace.

"It 's as remarkable in a mental way," said the chemist, positively, "as my echo is in acoustics!" And this gave rise to a fresh explanation on his part.

During all this, Ethel had been looking at her husband a little pensively. He was always energetic, but it struck her that just then he was excited. It was strange to her, also, to find him gliding back into the past so easily, — a past of which she knew so little, — accompanied by this accomplished woman, of whom she likewise knew almost nothing. It was odd that Ben should have reminiscences,

associations with her, so penetrating, of which she, his wife, was ignorant. But the surprise and slight dissatisfaction aroused by this were only momentary, and faded away in the general good-feeling and interest of the occasion.

IV.

After dinner, when they went into the small, unripe-looking parlor, where Anice by her mere presence placed the farmer's plain belongings in an attitude of apology, Mr. Evans began telling how he happened to come to Tanford. "You would suppose that, coming from so far inland, we would go to the sea-coast. But I don't like the sea, — the perpetual smell of sea-weed and old fish, which people say is so exhilarating. We 've been to Lake Ontario and the Wine Islands, and St. Lawrence, and the Delaware Water Gap, and other places" —

"And even tried staying at home," smiled Mrs. Eulow.

"And we 're tired of 'em all," he continued. "Now, my father was a farmer in this place for a while, when he was a young man, and it suddenly struck me I 'd come here."

"Is this the very same farm?" asked Ethel.

"Oh, dear, *I* don't know!" exclaimed Mr. Evans, his old habit of appearing to be immersed in details reasserting itself. "I 've inquired around, but can't find out anything. No one has even taken the trouble to remember his existence. I shall look the thing up at the registry of deeds in Worcester, if I ever get time. But the fact is, my father did n't stay here long; and that 's where he showed his sense. It 's a fine place for the summer; beautiful scenery, of course; but the farming!" Here he screwed up his sagacious eyes significantly, tumbled his restless hair about with his hands a little more, and abandoned the attempt to express the desperateness of the situation; but he rehabilitated and paraded an old joke about raising crops of mortgages, which amused Ethel.

The gentlemen presently removed to the porch in order to smoke, the ladies staying within for a while. "I 've persuaded our farmer to bring up my horse Star," said Mrs.

Eulow, "and then we 'll go out and look at him. I hope you 'll ride him, sometimes."

"I shall not dare to. I never rode much," said the young matron; and they settled themselves for a brief feminine chat. Ethel was on her guard against allowing it to be seen that her husband had not imparted to her all his memories of the widow; but Mrs. Eulow soon drew from her the main facts of her own history, learned how arduous Fenn's struggle for existence had been, and was even yet; then sounded her as to her tastes and talked with her about her favorite authors, who proved to be Tennyson, Dickens, and Whittier. "You see, I have my piano here," said she. "The room is hardly large enough, but — Oh, by the way, will you play for us?"

Again Mrs. Ethel's answer was negative. She shook her head, almost like a mortified school-girl. "I used to play a very little before I was married," said she; "but only for myself — and for Mr. Fenn, of course. But I don't practice." She would not confess that they had not a piano at home.

The bay came up at this juncture, and was duly admired. Ethel even became enthusiastic, and secretly thought she would try riding again. Going out to the porch for a better view of Star, they found Mr. Evans and Fenn in the midst of a debate so weighty and earnest that Ethel thought they must be discussing some great political movement.

"You must make changes here, sir; you *must* make them. I tell you, it 's a great reform!" Mr. Evans was saying with energy.

"Our people are conservative in Massachusetts," Fenn interposed.

"Politics?" queried Ethel.

"No," said Mr. Evans, like a man who has interests on his hands too grave to allow of much interruption from women. "It 's beet sugar."

"I knew it must be," laughed his daughter.

"Mr. Evans," explained the chemist, with the air of a neutral placed on the defensive, "maintains that the farmers in this State ought to take up the culture of sugar beets on a large scale."

"Giving twenty-five to forty tons to the acre," said the old gentleman warmly, "at six dollars a ton from the manufacturer; after which" —

"But I have told you that the Department of Agriculture has found out, by chemical test, that both Indian corn and amber cane yield a larger percentage of sugar than beets do," the other objected.

The lawyer continued to talk about "refuse pulp," and two crops in a season, but was gradually led away from his theme by a diversion to small fruits and gem tomatoes.

There was a moment of silence, and Ethel turned to Mrs. Eulow. "Won't you sing me something?" she asked. "I want so much to hear you, after what my husband has said." She spoke in so low a tone that the two men could not hear.

Anice looked at her in an odd, semi-indulgent way, apparently about to comply; the young wife's manner was so confiding, so gentle. Suddenly, however, her glance passed on to Fenn, who was still soothing

the disputant with raspberries, and particularly the raising of Pride of the Hudson on warm, moist soils; and she changed her mind. "Not now, Mrs. Fenn," she said; "wait till another time; I 'm not in the right mood. Besides, we 're going to take you to drive, soon."

Did she refuse because it was not Fenn who had asked her? Possibly. She was usually very complaisant and ready to exercise her voice; and either his indifference at the moment affected her, or else a whim to please herself with reserving for the present, intact, the charm which had first won her the admiration of Ethel's husband. It was significant, too, that Fenn, who in a moment or two more had exhausted temporarily the soil for small fruits, did not think of asking to hear her. He had always been eager to do so hitherto when he imagined himself to have no deeper interest. Mrs. Eulow observed it, and a quick intuition told her that his unconscious indifference to her voice now might mean that another kind of interest had sprung up, or revived, within him.

It took only a moment for these little impulses and perceptions to pass through her mind; instinct and passion, like light, travel with incalculable swiftness. The cigars were finished, and the group returned to the parlor, where Anice quietly sat down at the piano, and began stealing from the instrument minor chords of a Song Without Words, in which many black keys were involved. Ethel, who had followed with a disappointed air, thought that her wish was to be gratified, after all. But Anice noticed that Fenn was abstractedly glancing over some books on the table, and she continued to weave the voiceless harmony in a subdued volume, with light and remote touches.

"Ah," remarked the young man, all at once, "I see you are looking into chemistry yourself, Mr. Evans." He held up a scientific journal, which he had found.

"Oh, no. Those are of my daughter's collection."

Anice stopped playing, and looked around. "You see," she said rather archly, "I knew what you meant by an aniline dye. Twelve

parts carbon, seven of hydrogen, and one of nitrogen!"

Fenn was evidently pleased. "So you really have been studying it?"

"Not studying; only reading," the widow said, apologetically.

He turned over three or four other pamphlets and books, and came upon one thin report on a special subject, bearing his own name; at which he uttered a cry of surprise and satisfaction. Ethel went hastily to see what it was. "Where did you ever pick this up?" he inquired.

"Oh," said Anice, carelessly, "I found out accidentally that you had written it, and sent for a copy." She did not tell him that her whole interest in the science had sprung up from the knowledge that he pursued it; and perhaps, under the circumstances, silence on this point was the better honesty; but the chemist, without egotism, instantly suspected the truth.

"I shall take a new interest in what I write now," he said, in a tone of quiet enjoyment, but without raising his glance to

her. "You must have found it pretty dry, though," he added, with a significant look at his wife.

"You must n't ask me too much," said the widow, as if inclined to snub him a little.

Ethel laughed in great glee. "You did n't get your compliment, Ben, did you? Served him right," she confided to Mr. Evans, who had somehow pleased her from the beginning, and given her an agreeable sense of sympathy.

"It 's compliment enough that she should have read it at all," retorted Fenn, somewhat nettled.

Anice rose from the piano with a vague air of triumph about her, which no one especially noticed. "I hear the carry-all coming," she announced to them.

"And I have an idea!" said Mr. Evans, starting up with unusual energy. "It is n't very hot to-day, and a short walk would n't do me any harm, after dinner. I propose that we go and try Mr. Fenn's echo."

"Capital!" cried the widow, becoming almost the young girl again, in her vivacity.

"You mean we will walk over? And how shall we try it? Some one must start the echoing from here, you know."

"Oh, we 'll have the farm horn tooted," said her father. "How will that do, Mrs. Fenn?"

"I would rather hear Mrs. Eulow sing," Ethel said, timidly.

"You shall, then," declared the old gentleman, firmly, as if he had taken her under special protection, and was going to make her a sort of pet.

Fenn did not altogether like the notion of Anice's singing for the experiment. He was as much averse to it as if he had had a peculiar ownership in her melodious capability. It struck him that she herself did n't like the idea; but, after a brief hesitation, she assented.

Accordingly, the remaining three set out across the fields. The modest and unstylish carry-all, suited to the hilly roads, was to meet them at a point below the oak, near the foot of the hill, whither Fenn was confident they could go by the birch-path. The

signal of their arrival at the echo ground was to be a blast on the horn, which they took with them for that purpose. Mr. Evans's pace was slow; Fenn was aware of a curious blankness and suspense coming over him, as soon as they had got away from Anice; and Ethel was in haste to hear those magical notes: so that when they reached the tree by the wall they were an impatient trio.

The horn sounded.

After a few seconds, a faint thread of melody reached them, swelling, after a scarcely perceptible break, almost at once into a louder but still distant strain. The air, as Mr. Evans told them, when a few bars had been given, was one which Anice had heard in the mountains of Tyrol.

"It does n't sound right, though," Fenn observed. "Could I have been deceived about that echo? It was a very subtle, elusive thing."

"I did n't half believe in it, even yesterday," said Ethel, smiling. "But oh, Mr. Evans, how beautiful your daughter's voice is! I should think you would be very proud."

"So proud, madam," he answered, with a good deal of elaborateness, "that I have never been willing to have her appear in opera."

"What a pity!" was Ethel's first, impulsive utterance. "But no; perhaps it is n't. That voice is too lovely for most people to be fit to hear it. Does she want to?"

"Go upon the stage? No; I 'm glad to say, not. But she has been urged to, continually, both here and abroad."

Fenn had listened attentively, and was more pleased than there was any occasion for being, that his wife liked Anice's singing. He said nothing about this, however. "Let 's try it again," he proposed, taking up the horn.

The second signal was answered as the first had been, except that the responsive strain was now a hunting-song, which came to them in this wild, half-sylvan spot with an inspiriting motion.

But the man of science was dissatisfied. "I can't make it out," he said to the other two. "Does n't it seem to you more as if

the sounds came from the birches, up above here? It is n't like yesterday, at any rate."

"It *did* sound nearer," Mr. Evans agreed. "To tell the truth, Mr. Fenn, I 'm not entirely satisfied with your discovery." It was plain that Mr. Evans had not forgotten the younger man's opposition on the sugar-beet question.

Just then a rich peal of laughter, a melody in itself, sounded forth not far from the group; and, turning in that direction, they saw Anice standing in the fluttering shadow of the white-stemmed birches, a few yards away. "Was I a good echo?" she called out, merrily. "I 've been here all the time, since you came." At this there was a general hilarity. Anice had, in fact, taken the upper part of the hill, and made her way to a convenient shelter, while the rest were walking slowly over, below.

"And you made all those changes of distance just by altering your voice?" asked Ethel.

"Oh, that 's very easy," said Mrs. Eulow. "I really did n't think I could deceive you all."

"But where are we to meet the carriage?" her father inquired, practically.

"Just where we said. I 've sent it down."

As they took their way to the appointed place, Fenn wondered at the change that had gradually made itself visible in Anice since their unexpected encounter, scarcely twenty-four hours earlier. On leaving her then, he had thought of her as sad and statuesque, a form placed in some shadowy corner of life, and with all its loveliness veiled in sorrow, which he had been permitted to gaze upon once more, but which could perhaps never come again into the circle of intimate and usual realities. To-day, on the contrary, — nay, within the two hours just past, — she had become a joyous and hopeful presence; she was even sportive; those fair hands, which had seemed to move with so mournful a languor in the departed twilight, now expressed buoyancy. It might have been a thoroughly happy woman who followed the narrow pathway with him, and he was within a little of doubting the justness of his first impression. This quick tran-

sition was exhilarating, alluring. He may have felt that his own appearance on the scene had something to do with it, and this, again, may have led him to walk faster, so that Anice and he drew away from Ethel, who came behind with Mr. Evans.

The track grew fainter; the ground was roughened by roots that struggled to escape from their smothered underground existence. Finally, the pair were confronted by a loose stone wall. Fenn leaped over, and extended his hand. Mrs. Eulow mounted adroitly, and accepted his aid; then, as she gave a slight spring to the ground and withdrew her hand from his, he received an unmistakable but fleeting pressure from her clasp. Coming at the instant after she had touched the grass and no longer needed support, it was hard to believe it had not been intentional, evanescent though it was.

Anice walked rapidly on over the open but uneven space they had entered; then stopped, waiting, holding up her parasol, perfectly self-possessed, and apparently searching for Ethel and her father.

Fenn had paused instinctively by the wall, intending to assist his wife when she should come. The first definite result of the surprise which Anice's touch had caused was indignation mixed with alarm. She was doing an injustice, he felt, both to herself and him. In another moment he dismissed as unworthy and unlawful the suspicion that she had meant to establish a mute communication with him in this way; besides, it was childish. When, in boyish years, this pressing of the hand had been a received method of indicating preference among little girls of his acquaintance, he had always considered it especially senseless; and it was quite unlikely that Mrs. Eulow would resort to it. "Some nervous movement; that was all," he said to himself. But curiosity ensued. If the gentle impact of that hand had been intentional, how much, after all, did it signify? A fine pulsation, a momentary delight and unexpected defiance, struck through his veins, and his heart beat tumultuously.

The whole situation did not last a minute. Fenn experienced these graduated phases so

swiftly that he could not consciously register them. Who knows what corresponding activity took place under the impassive exterior and behind the frank, luminous eyes of the woman standing a few paces away? Yet time enough even for embarrassment had not passed, and nothing appeared to have happened. They looked precisely as they had done before; the bare and rocky ground, the clear hot sky, the trees, were not more natural and unchanged. But the blue of the sky seemed to rain a tingling fire into Fenn's breast; the very odors of the ground and the woods, the searching perfume of the sweet-fern, were laden now with a secret and inspired sweetness he had not detected before. He was resolved to learn more; he felt himself challenged to conquer some admission or some denial from this strangely fascinating friend of his.

"Let us wait a moment," he said. Anice smiled pleasantly.

Ethel arrived, and was assisted by him: her hand was strong and trusting, but it certainly did not impart that peculiar pressure

which had just now influenced him so potently.

It haunted him throughout the drive, which was long and beautiful, leading through a singular region of low land between the Tanford plateau and another wilder ridge: a region thickly wooded, with plunging descents down steep and bowery declivities, abrupt turns to this and that side of the valley; and encounters with a streamlet, alternately flowing in bright shallows where the sunlight made amber of it, and lost in deep trout-pools, which Ethel said would be just the place for little Mr. Sharon Reeves, a wandering Episcopal clergyman at the Institute, who was trying to acquire a worldly air by practicing with the rod and line. At another point, some unforeseen ascent would bring them to a line of maples, a few fields, and a farm-house, which appeared to be utterly lost to the world, but boasted a stunted little croquet-ground, with hoops set all awry like skeleton grave-stones.

"I should think the people here," said Ethel, "would have some difficulty in find-

ing even themselves, to say nothing of the world."

But these little homes were happily unconscious of their obscurity, and presented a serene front to the flying critics in the carryall.

Mr. Evans had explored the route before; but it was new to Fenn, and the absence of knowledge as to what lay ahead suited his mood. Besides, the beauty of the sun-dazzled curtain of leaves through which they peered on either side; the lance-like thrust of long beech boughs and infinite tracery of finer branches in the depth of the wood; the pale reminiscence of autumn in the rain-flattened dead leaves on the earth, from which the trunks rose erect, or steadied themselves at strange angles, like bodies poised for swimming; the dull or twinkling shadows; the tints of green and gray, dim blue, lilac, and gold, that trembled in and out among the clean, strong forms of growth, — these things alone gave an active stimulus to the senses. A cool, spicy incense rose to meet them from the coverts of undergrowth

and vine, or was distilled by the sunbeams from gaunt and noiseless ranks of pine on sandy banks above the road; clumps of hardhack, with its panicles of hoary rose, and stretches of chiccory, with its hardy purple-blue, seemed to float past them as they rolled on. They branched from one narrow way into another, enjoying it all with that zest belonging to American scenery away from towns, which comes from the impossibility of taking anything for granted about it.

"Is this a park, or a forest, or an English estate in an unkempt, second-growth condition, or what, may I ask?" said Fenn, at last.

"It 's nothing particular," answered Anice, "and it rejoices in the name of Tom's Swamp."

"I don't think we 've seen Tom or the swamp, yet," said he. "Where do you keep them, Mr. Evans?"

"Tom himself is a myth," began Mr. Evans; "or a historical person" —

"Which is the same thing nowadays,"

Ethel cynically remarked, to her husband's surprise.

"Yes, that's true. As for the swamp, you'll see a little corner of it before long."

It was merely a gleam of low, watery ground, with the pale purple clusters and flat leaves that belonged there, seen among the trees; and from here the horse was guided to scale the Tanford ridge once more, the top of which was coursed along for miles by the broad turnpike that had once been a post-road, and was lined with towering elms, suggesting endless relays of couriers. They passed an old house, deserted like many others in the township, where marigolds and satin-flowers, balsams and hollyhocks, were growing in the midst of rank weeds and wild creepers that were slowly tugging at the roof, to get it down.

"Do you think that could have been your father's?" asked Ethel, to whom the coincidence relating to the dead Evans appeared romantic.

"Very likely," returned the lawyer, becoming harassed with imaginary business again, and touching up the mare.

In this way the drive continued, Anice and Fenn the same as ever in their bearing toward one another, in spite of those transient and silent passages which, several times since morning, had appeared to be preparing the way for some changed attitude. And, in truth, what was there to make them alter their bearing, as yet? Decidedly, neither had any definite assurance that the other had any thought which would have been better away, or concealed spark that might break into a dangerous blaze. As for Fenn, he would have asked, — had there been any reasoning upon such a theme, — What is a man to do in his position? Must he say openly to the lady immediately concerned that he finds himself imprudently interested in her, and thinks it best that they should not encounter often? At one time it would have been according to his code to speak in this fashion, attacking the matter directly; but the time had rather gone by for those ideas. He had told Anice, once, that he did not mean to make love to her, and it was questionable whether any good

had been accomplished by it ; possibly much harm was to come of that verdant confidence.

These reflections passed through his mind in detached order, at intervals of the drive ; but, above all, Fenn was sound-hearted and healthy, and the rush of pure air against his cheeks, the sweet odors of the country, tempered the slow fever which had set in at that critical moment in the rocky field, where Anice and he had waited for Ethel. He enjoyed, too, his wife's keen pleasure in this simple after-dinner diversion, and the sight of it did him good. Mr. Evans struck off from the old post-road again, through broad, cultivated acres, hedged with single lines of ash and maple bordering the rough walls, and so down into another wild trough, on the opposite and southern side of Tanford, quite unlike the swamp ; more open, breezier, containing houses of a more prosperous aspect, and occasional orchards. Here, too, at the very bottom was a saw-mill, in a state of dead quiescence, like most small mills of its kind for a great part of the year. The only practical purpose it served was as an adventurous

perch for the Rev. Mr. Reeves, who, fish-pole in hand, was humming a lively popular ditty, upon which he prided himself as marking his rapid advance in broad and manly culture; allowing his hook, meanwhile, to dangle cautiously in the rough water.

This was the last point of interest, for it was followed by a long and painfully slow climb on the part of the fagged mare up towards Tanford, her head being pointed for the top of the church spire, the only object in the village plainly discernible from this depth. The ascent was so steep as to resemble a flight upward in the air; but when they reached the hill-top they were at the base of the spire, instead of its summit, — a fact at which Mrs. Ethel professed to be much astonished. And, "Oh, you dreary old Institute," she said, addressing the blank and dusty front of the academic hotel, when they had alighted in front of it, "I feel as if I 'd been away for a week!"

V.

THERE is said to have existed among the Jews an oracle of echoes, and although its responses and prophecies must have been somewhat vague, Fenn could at this time have believed that they were impressively minatory, in cases of predicted danger. An echo is in itself a mock, which seems to fling back upon you something of its own hollowness and transiency. What could more appropriately bring home to a human being his own fleeting, perishable and fateful state than a helpless rebounding of sound thrown from surface to surface, and lost in space? Then, as to prophetic tone, this ghostly repetition symbolizes well the truth that what has been will be again; that the future has in store for us some exact return of good or evil for what we are now doing; or that a result impending at the current hour is often the direct consequence of an act or utterance

preceding it by a long time, the echo of which is only just reaching us. Of some such oracle Fenn was beginning to take counsel. His own consciousness was full of mysterious reverberations, which were repeated or accompanied in the coincidences surrounding him. There was the striking accident of Anice's voice breaking into his reverie at the instant when he had been recalling it; there was the unbidden return of excitement as he watched the stars and thought of her face; and, again, the furtive, unconscious association with her of the odor of violets in the old garden. Going over the incidents of the day, and thinking of these things, he was forced to ask what they portended. Like muffled echoes they responded, and he understood the answer, although it was not given in words.

"What did you think of Mrs. Eulow?" he asked his wife, when they were alone in their room.

"Oh, I think she's remarkably handsome."

"Yes, she is, rather," he admitted, as if he had not previously quite made up his mind about this.

"It 's more than 'rather,'" said Ethel. "Can't you be a little more enthusiastic?"

"Why?"

"Because if you 're not impressed by *her*, I shall begin to think you 've never really seen anything pretty about me." She was fastening a jewel-pin at her throat, and gave him a half-coquettish look, yet there was a touch of seriousness in her sweet, simple face.

"What nonsense, Ethel! I don't like you even to hint that you 're not the loveliest woman I know." And it was true that she was so to Fenn. He went on: "Mrs. Eulow is a beauty, there 's no doubt of that; but it is only one kind of beauty. She is the sort of woman I would like to pay compliments to."

"I should say that 's a pleasant kind of woman to be."

"No; compliments are not the highest form of admiration. But Mrs. Eulow would have such a way of receiving them — not believing them exactly, you know, but understanding that they were the best a man could

offer her — that it would be a pleasure to give them. Don't you see how there are some people who compel just that form of tribute?"

"I suppose I can understand," said Ethel. "But you speak as if you 'd never tried it with her, or had n't known her such a long time."

Her husband perceived that his theory did not apply very well. "The fact is," he acknowledged, "I never did do that sort of thing, the few times I met her."

"But I thought you had seen a good deal of her."

"No; not much."

"Mr. Evans said she saw you as long ago as ten years."

"That 's a mistake. It was n't more than eight."

"Well, I think it 's very queer you never talked to me about her. I was dreadfully put out when he began speaking as if I knew all about the acquaintance. Of course I had to pretend I did, and then get him to tell me; and I don't like to do that. It 's deceptive."

"Never mind," said Fenn, seeing that she was nettled, and at once becoming so himself. "We can't be forever telling people the exact truth. If we did they would n't care anything about us."

"Then I suppose it was all a fib, when Mr. Evans said they thought of you so often, and had hoped they might meet me some time."

"Not necessarily. I can conceive," said Fenn, sarcastically, "of their taking some mild interest in me and my affairs."

"Yes," said Ethel, veering around at once, for the sake of the advantage; "but I think it would have been better taste if she had kept those chemical books out of sight, — at any rate, for a while."

Fenn got up, angrily, and took his hat. "Do you mean to say you think she put them there on purpose to impress me?" he demanded.

"Ben, I forbid you to speak to me that way. It 's just as improper as your not telling me about your friends beforehand. And what difference does it make to you whether she put them in sight purposely, or not?"

"Poh!" said he. "It's ridiculous even to suggest that I care. But I detest seeing you allow yourself such petty ideas." He took a few steps towards the door, but his wife hardly thought he would go; the dispute was at too interesting a stage to be dropped.

She made a slight concession, and started afresh. "I did n't say I thought so," she reminded him. "But I do think it would have been nicer not to thrust her interest in chemistry at you, the first thing."

"She did n't," said Fenn, settling down to a methodical altercation. "It would have argued a horrible self-consciousness if she had packed them all away before inviting us to dinner." The truth was he had been more pleased with the episode of the books than he at all knew, until its charm was so rudely lessened.

"The secret of all this," his wife returned, "is that you want me to be just like her. You are never satisfied; you never will be." He made a sound of vigorous impatience, but allowed her to proceed. "You know, Ben, that I am very proud of your being a

scientific man, and I listen to everything you say, and try to understand it. I like to have you explain; but I did n't fall in love with chemistry and marry it. I like it because it 's you that explain it to me. But if I went and made myself a woman of science, what need should I have of a *man* of science?"

"You could n't be a woman of science, unless you soaked your whole mind with things in my laboratory, just as I do," he retorted, rather vindictively, though what she had said had pleased him.

"Then Mrs. Eulow can't, either," declared Ethel, with an air of finality.

"No, she can't," he assented, "and she does n't pretend to. But it 's a very good thing for her to read about anything of the kind that she 's interested in; and so it would be for you." Upon this, Ethel, tossing some small articles into a drawer, and shutting it with slight emphasis, effected a movement of the head which meant that she would do exactly as she pleased about that. Her husband, however, felt that it was time for him to respond to the kind things she had said

about him, and he added more gently, "You know, my dear, I appreciate you and delight in you as you are. If I had n't — Well, I think I gave the most substantial proof of it that I could, some time ago."

"Yes, you did," she said, with a loving glance. Everything was in train for a reconciliation. "I wish I could make myself more interesting," she went on humbly. "Very likely I shall succeed, one of these days." She was silent a moment, and he took her hand, smiling. By some unexplained connection of ideas, she returned to Anice. "Did you know Mrs. Eulow would n't sing for me?" she asked. "I wanted her to, at the house, and she would n't. Then, when we were going to try the experiment, she sang close to us, just because we did n't want her to. Don't you think that was queer? I was really hurt when she refused me."

Fenn quietly relinquished the hand. "You are very critical this evening," he said, coldly. But he was annoyed at himself for having forgotten so important a thing as asking the widow to sing for his wife.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Ethel. "What harm have I done? May n't I say anything at all about Mrs. Eulow?"

"Why, yes; yes. It 's to be hoped we can tell each other what we think. But" — Fenn would have found some difficulty in stating what he held his wife to blame for. He half lifted his hat again, in a preparatory way, and burst out, with more irritation than was common in him: "I can't stand this, Ethel, positively. Here are these two people, old friends: they 've done as much as they could to make things pleasant for us to-day; and, besides that, Mrs. Eulow is a charming woman, well worth knowing. Yet the first thing to be done is to pick her to pieces."

The criticism was not altogether ill founded, but Ethel merely laughed, and said, with exasperating acuteness, "You began with being almost apathetic, yourself, about her beauty, and you said she did n't command the highest kind of admiration; and now, when I have said one or two little things" —

"Oh, well," interrupted her husband, in

a desperate tone, "if you want to spoil the whole pleasure of an acquaintance that might have made our vacation more agreeable, go ahead! You will lose as much as I shall. But of course, if you choose to have it this way, you must. Only, you both appeared to like each other so much, and I thought you were having such a good time, that I 'm naturally a little surprised and disgusted."

And with this very moderate description of his feelings he left the room abruptly.

Ethel followed in a moment, passed through the large corridor below, and vainly scanned the increasing darkness without for some trace of him. She was very anxious for him to come back, now. In reality she liked her new acquaintance more than she did most women, and the tone she had taken was entirely due to her annoyance at not having known more about her. But as Fenn did not reappear promptly, to receive her apology, she went into the dining-room alone.

She had nearly finished supper, and he had not returned, when two ladies coming by, from another table, stopped to speak.

One was stout, in a baggy skirt profusely trimmed, and carried on her head a variety of puffs and ribbon ; she had numerous downward wrinkles about the mouth, indicating an exuberant, contented, confidential bent. The other was small, dry even to gauntness: she wore a vast number of artificial seed-pearls sewn on to her scrimped black dress; which furnished Ethel with an amusing fancy that they represented fruit hanging to a prematurely withered bough.

"Oh, Mrs. Fenn!" exclaimed the comfortably confidential lady, with a cheap imitation of a wicked smile. "So glad to get at you without your husband! Is n't that naughty of me?"

"Why, Mrs. Dadmun?"

"We had a little plan to propose," said Mrs. Whidden, the thin companion, taking the answer upon herself, "and we should hardly have dared to do it if he had been here." Whereupon they both laughed, apparently from pride in their audacious anti-marital manœuvre.

"I don't see how that could have pre-

vented, if it 's anything I can do at all," said Ethel.

"It 's nothing in the world but this," Mrs. Dadmun responded, becoming matter of fact: "there is a picnic party for to-morrow, and we have just one place left in the carriages. We got as far as that, and then everybody decided that we *must* have you and Mr. Fenn; but as there 's only one place, we 're obliged to ask you alone, and leave your husband to come on horseback, or something of that sort."

"Two of the gentlemen are going to walk; they start earlier than the rest of us," Mrs. Whidden volunteered. "You *won't* disappoint us, Mrs. Fenn, will you? There 's Miss Ibbot and Miss Hamill, — they 're going; and Sharon Reeves, and Kingsmill — You ought to know Mr. Kingsmill better, Mrs. Fenn. He 's quite an admirer of yours!" And Mrs. Whidden put a starved smile on duty, as she ended.

"Let me think" — began Ethel.

"Have you been to Temple Lake yet?" asked Mrs. Dadmun, disposing her wrinkles in amiable array.

"No; and I should like very much to join your picnic — if Ben were only here." The thought that he was not there, and that he ought to be, brought out a rebellious impulse to accept the invitation, and go without him.

"He will come if you consent, of course," said Mrs. Dadmun.

"I don't know," Ethel answered, seizing more firmly the project of going alone; "he has been saying there was some work that he must do in a day or two, to send off to the city. But you are all so kind to have thought of me that I think I'll decide to go, any way."

"You 're a dear! How very nice!" said the ladies. "At nine o'clock, — so as to get there before it's too hot, you know."

As they passed out of the dining-room, Fenn came in, and they accorded him a very suave greeting. His boots were dusty, and the moisture on his face showed that he had been walking fast. He had gone out in a fit of intense vexation, and had been walking along the old post-road, without much idea what he wanted to do. With a conscience

slightly disturbed, he had been quick to suppose that Ethel was a shade jealous of Anice (though that was in fact far from being the case), and he resented this in proportion to the secret knowledge he possessed of there being some justification for such jealousy. But perhaps his acutest displeasure arose from the added peril in which that sentiment on his wife's part would place him. It was bad enough to be afflicted with the recrudescence of a passion which it was wrong for him to think twice of; to have it aggravated by a hostility on Ethel's part, which would inevitably drive him more irresistibly towards Anice, was unendurable. A taper held above the channeled heat of a lamp becomes the axis of a tiny aurora, which flashes volatile blue flame all around it in the air, yet does not ignite the scroll itself. By a slight change in its position, a little altering of the draught of air, the taper itself breaks into clear fire. Fenn's mind was in the incipient stage: his suppressed ardor towards Anice did not yet seem wholly to possess him; the flame was visionary and hovering, — did not

reach quite to his heart. But he feared that the unexpected ground Ethel had assumed in their conversation this evening made the trifling change that would cause that premonitory gleam of infatuation to puff out in an actual blaze.

Restless and suffering, he thought he would not rejoin his wife, but would go down to the other end of the village, where Pincott, an artist of mild and genial temperament, was boarding with his family in a private house, and try the soothing effect of the painter's good-fellowship. He went as far as the gate, and caught sight of Pincott sitting in a rocking-chair outside of the house, where the lamplight from behind a sunflower-studded window-curtain fell on his gray hair, and showed the smoke floating idly up from his meerschaum. The figure was so peaceful, it did him good to see it: a gush of tenderness poured back into his heart. "Dear old Pincott!" he murmured; and as the painter fortunately did not discover him, he turned and went quickly back to the hotel.

So both husband and wife had relented,

and both saw that their petty discord had been absurd; but Ethel had on her mind the affair of the picnic, of which she preferred to say nothing at present, and there was therefore a reserve between them. Ethel waited for him graciously, at the table; they did not talk much, but as they went out to the portico she said, "I don't think you understood, Ben, how much I like Mrs. Eulow. I expect to enjoy her immensely. Really, for the little I know about her, I think more of her than I ever did of any woman on a first introduction, and I won't say anything mean about her again."

"That 's right," he said, gratefully. "You 're always good in the end."

They sat down in a corner under the colonnade, and amused themselves talking of Mr. Evans, and about the people in the hotel and Pincott's pictures. But at last young Kingsmill came up to them. He was one of the handsome young men, it should be explained, who were given to taking picturesque positions on the railing. He had dark gray eyes and a very magnificent mustache,

and when he talked, the Adam's apple in his throat moved with great activity and prominence.

"I'm so delighted to hear that you're going with us to-morrow," he said, addressing them both.

Fenn was completely surprised, and while his wife was saying, "Yes, it ought to be very pleasant," he began with, "To-morrow? what comes off then? I had n't heard" —

"Why, the picnic. Temple Lake, you know," said Kingsmill.

"I did n't know whether you could go, Ben," said Ethel, turning to Fenn. "Mrs. Dadmun and Mrs. Whidden were speaking about it before you came in."

"Oh! Yes, I 've heard that it 's a beautiful spot," he returned, directing his words at Kingsmill, and stifling his dissatisfaction at not having been told about the excursion before.

"Shall you go?" the young man inquired, with a concentrated glance.

Fenn perceived that Kingsmill was not so anxious for his company as he might have

been. "It 's pretty far," he answered, "and I 've been meaning to get some papers ready for my firm, soon. I may not be able to give the time."

When Ethel explained to him, afterward, that he would have to get a horse, he gave up the plan decisively.

In the morning, however, when he had watched the party drive off, a great depression fell upon him. He kept thinking of Kingsmill and his air of attention towards Ethel; then it occurred to him that he was missing a rather pleasant affair, and his work was not so very pressing. He made inquiries about a horse, but found the limited stable of the Institute exhausted; whereupon he became determined, and searched the village for a steed. He obtained one, after some effort, — bony and unaristocratic, but able to carry him, — and started in the direction of Temple. An eighth of a mile brought him to a fork of the road, Temple being on the line of one branch: the other led to Mr. Evans's house. He stopped the horse's trot as he approached, and a weak

disinclination to go to the picnic beset him. "Ethel almost arranged it so that I should n't go," he reflected; and by the time he reached the fork he had pressed the rein which would turn his horse towards Evans's. The next moment he was cantering briskly thither, and when he left the highway for the winding drive up to the farm-house his spirits had so risen that he hummed to himself blithely, "Should auld acquaintance be forgot?"

Anice had an enthusiasm for the very footfall of a horse, and came at once to the porch. She was clad in white, this morning, and bloomed against the woodbine-covered trellis like a morning-glory or petunia.

"Are you alone?" she cried, as if disappointed. "Where is Mrs. Fenn?"

"She has gone to a picnic. They had n't room for me."

"And you are going to ride after them?"

"I had thought of it."

The widow paused an instant. "I should like to take Star out," she said.

"Just what I was going to propose," Fenn

assured her, with vivacity, dismounting. "I will wait for you to get ready."

"But I can hardly go to the picnic," said Anice. "I have n't been invited."

"I shall be happy to go in any direction you like," he said, more seriously than he had spoken before.

She answered quickly that they would ride where he had intended, and that she would come back alone. In a few minutes she returned from her room, transformed, habited in a green-black riding-suit and a small cap suited for the country, which set off her beauty in a novel aspect. How they darted off over the white turnpike; the umbrageous elms waiting to cool them with momentary darkness! In other places spindling maples, newly set out, recorded their rapid flight in vertical lines which fell behind, one after another, and were gone, while the wide country sparkled on either hand in multitudinous greens, among interblended tints of fields with their wild flowers, or distant hill-sides left red from the cutting of a buckwheat harvest. The steady earth seemed to fly, and

only the moving clouds appeared motionless. It was very exhilarating; and when they struck off where a huge butternut-tree and a paintless house marked the junction of two roads, and entered a silent pine wood, they were glad to go more slowly and enjoy the glow of their first gallop, at rest.

"My rickety beast is stimulated by the example of Star, I think," observed the cavalier.

Anice laughed freshly and heartily, as if she had been sending forth a roulade of notes in a song. "Don't be too hard on your nameless gray," said she. "He brings you along very well, and you ought to be grateful. I'm sure *I* am."

"He appreciates his good luck in having a companion, as I do mine." Fenn got this off gracefully.

"Oh, listen!" exclaimed Anice, abruptly, reining Star in. "I hear a beautiful note in the woods."

Fenn stopped, also. The note was that of a wood-thrush. Its lonely, exquisite refrain made the listeners think of a shattered ray of

sunlight falling pensively into the recesses of greenery whence the notes issued; and a blending of sorrow, or it may be of longing, streamed into the light mood of the previous moment. They went on through the piece of pines without further conversation; an identical train of feeling possessed each mind.

The horseman was careful not to keep up too rapid a pace, and they followed the winding road up hill and down, with numerous intervals of slow walking and agreeable talk, arriving at Temple, six miles away, without having overtaken the larger party. The lake was at a short distance from this village, and Mrs. Eulow said she must turn Star's head, without going farther.

"I shall not allow you to ride home alone," said Fenn.

"That 's hardly fair," she answered. "I really can't go on to the lake, and if I take you back with me Mrs. Fenn will be disappointed."

"To tell you the truth," he informed her, "they don't expect me at the picnic, for I gave it up this morning, and I believe I should enjoy riding a good deal better."

"Oh, well, then, if it 's not interfering with any plan" — she began.

"No; I thought it was just as well to come this way, and then we could decide." Fenn had had an additional reason, which he did not disclose; and this was that it would have been undesirable to be seen riding from Tanford in any other than the direction of the picnic. "I have a notion," he concluded, energetically, "that we can get home by another way, — coming down to your house over Sheep's Back."

"Is n't that too long?" she asked.

"It can't be more than a mile or two farther."

"Then I should like it ever so much," said Anice, with great vim.

He fancied he saw in her face a new expression of pleasure, softer than any he had noticed there before, as they moved away again. It made him tingle with a mad, forbidden delight.

They succeeded in finding the road which led over the mountain-side. It was rough and solitary, but at every rod it grew more

delightful, rising to a climax of grandeur where it cut into the lofty crown of the hill, and was embowered like a leafy gallery in young beeches and chestnuts and other forest trees. But the Nameless Gray, as Anice had called him, gave signs of disastrous fatigue when they reached this point. Several times Fenn had dismounted and led him up severe inclines, and now, in going down to the valley, he was obliged to repeat the process.

"This is tedious work," he said, at length, "and I 'm getting very hungry."

"You see you will be sorry, after all, that you did n't go to the lake," Anice observed, with possibly a trace of malice. "It 's a little after twelve, and they 'll soon be eating."

"Don't make fun of my masculine appetite," he implored. "I don't regret the picnic a bit, but I am hungry; and it 's very hot, besides. Suppose we have a little picnic of our own."

"With all my heart; but where are the provisions?"

"I see a small house down there. We 'll stop and get something."

It was true there was a house, crowded down among the wild trees as if it had been put there for squirrels; but when they came down to it, no tokens of inhabitancy were found; it was deserted. A wilderness of blackberry bushes, however, surrounded the place, and they at once decided to tether their horses out of sight from the path, and make a lunch of fruit. Fenn held threatening branches aside, here and there, and found the largest clusters of berries for Anice. There was a good deal of excitement as to which should make the most striking discoveries in this line.

"Oh, how pleasant this is!" cried the widow, merrily. "I feel as if I were a girl again."

"Yes," said her friend, "this is a magic fruit, that takes away all care, and restores happiness to the sorrowful."

While they were engaged in the primitive and refreshing pursuit of this innocent food, several thrushes began singing with indolent sweetness in a thick covert, not far away. Anice let a heavy-laden branch slip from her fingers and spring back to its place.

"Those birds again! How wonderful they are! Why, this place seems to be full of them. Could n't we see one, Mr. Fenn?"

"It 's very hard to get near them. I never saw but one, though I 've tried a good many times. But I should like nothing better than to try it again with you. Come."

She hesitated briefly; perhaps a sense that they were proceeding a little carelessly for persons in their position restrained her. But in a moment, with a slight air of defiance, she collected the long riding skirt more firmly in her hand, and joined her companion. A few steps brought them to an abandoned track, the mossy ruts of which were soft and refreshing to the foot, and led downward towards the haunt of the thrushes. It was broken by large stones, in places, and there Fenn offered the help of his hand; at first with a faint trembling in his voice, and afterwards in silence.

"We must move very carefully," he whispered, as they came to a small glade, more open than the surrounding forest, "or the birds will be frightened and fly away."

The mystery and caution of their advance pleased Mrs. Eulow. But, notwithstanding their care, the thrushes stopped singing before they had come very near.

"It 's always so," murmured her escort. "But they 'll begin again ; and we might as well stop and rest. Besides, the longer we wait, the better for my poor old gray." He dropped easily upon the ground, while giving this advice, and Anice followed his example.

"I wonder what has become of the people who lived up in that old house," she said ; "and I wonder whether they liked to hear the thrushes. I dare say they were very prosaic, and have gone off somewhere and become thriving hucksters ; but don't you always speculate about such things, and imagine some very mournful fate connected with these empty houses ?"

"I think I do," Fenn replied. "And I suppose it 's better to do that than to be thinking mournful things about ourselves."

They had continued, without noticing it, to speak in the low tones adopted out of

consideration for the timid songsters; and this insensibly gave what they said an intimate and almost tender quality.

"Yes, indeed. But you don't do *that*, at any rate."

"No, not much; though a man with any go in him is generally dissatisfied about something."

"Women sometimes have go in them, too," hinted the widow, smiling.

"That 's true," he admitted. He had begun to roll a cigarette. "Well, are *you* ever dissatisfied?" he asked, looking up.

She gave a subdued laugh. "You are never afraid to say things plainly," was what she said.

"I 'm not sure about that. I think I am sometimes." And Fenn felt that she must know what he referred to in his own mind.

"You used to be very direct, in old days," she returned, teasingly. "But, at any rate, there 's no reason why *I* should n't speak frankly, too. Yes, I am dissatisfied, and very often. My life is not a success; my memories are sad ones, and I have nothing to look forward to."

"I don't know," said he, "why you have n't anything to look forward to. You have money, and you have strong intellectual tastes. You can study, work, write; help mankind, and especially womankind, along."

"I would like to do that; sometimes I imagine I am preparing for it. But then at other times I think I would prefer to come away and live completely isolated, in some place like this deserted house." At these words a dizzying, faithless vision came to the man at her feet of the life he might lead in some profound seclusion with such a woman. "At those times everything seems to be over," she added.

"Did you love your husband so deeply,— is that it?" Fenn was impelled to ask, by a strange conglomerate desire. Among other things, he was troubled by an unreasonable jealousy, which he had no right to feel, of the hold which the dead Eulow might have had upon her.

Anice surprised him by her simple answer. "No. I was young when I married. I was mistaken."

There was so much quiet sadness in the way she said this, so much of self-respect and of respect for the husband she had lost, mingled with an unusual frankness accorded to the friend whom she considered worthy to hear this secret, that Fenn received no shock. Her manner was very far removed from that dank and earthy sentimentality in favor with certain women, who are forever disclosing their disappointments in order to win male sympathy.

He looked gravely into her face, and her eyes met his. He wished to take her hand, and soothe her and pity her; saying to himself that this at least could be done without danger. But something kept him from attempting it.

A fruitful silence succeeded, during which he looked up between the trees, and contemplated a huge white cloud that moved luxuriously through the ether, with sides made dazzling by the sunlight, yet easy for the eye to rest on. It brightened and darkened, according to the changing poise of the fleecy mass, and, from being speckless white, soft-

ened into the dim tints of the shaded feathers on a dove's breast. The image of Ethel in Fenn's mind was brightening and fading alternately like this cloud, floating away, insubstantial and remote. His love for her, which he had held on to so firmly under the first stress of temptation, was slipping from his grasp. Could it be, he asked himself in drowsy wonder, that it was an illusion, which was being dispelled by the contact of a more vital fervor? It might be well to test this by some hardy utterance to Anice, throwing off all concealment recklessly.

Suddenly he got up and stood before her, his eyes glowing with suppressed fire. "You ought not to think everything is over! There is much in store for you," he said to her. "Ah, I could help you, — I could show you how to live for something!"

The exclamation seemed to come without his will; but when it had escaped, he thought he had said everything, that he had disclosed his heart and stood on the verge of a crisis.

He was wrong.

"Will you do it — give me some direc-

tion and put purpose into my days?" Anice asked, grateful and eager.

The fire faded from his glance, and he looked down. "I wish I could. I will try. I hardly knew what I was promising," he answered, in a tone so changed that she was bewildered.

At this moment, the thrushes once more began swaying their slow, ecstatic yet melancholy notes on the tree-tops. But this time they were much farther away.

"Ah," said she, "they have commenced again. But we shall never find them, Mr. Fenn."

The same thought struck them both: that there was something in their lives which they were trying to find, but which was always beyond them, unattainable, like this elusive music of the woods.

Fenn resumed his place on the moss near her, with a pained and brooding look. "I can't help anybody," he said despondently. "I can't even manage myself. There is something the matter, and yet I am what is called a happy man."

"You have reason to be," said the widow, gently.

"I know I have." He said no more, and the thrushes' song resounded faintly through the silence, expressing the longing within him. In a few moments Anice reminded him that they must go.

"Wait a minute," he urged. "There is something I want to speak of. You have never mentioned, since, the extraordinary thing I said to you when I made my visit at your father's house."

The color in her cheeks receded a little, but she responded with seeming ease: "About not making love to me? Oh, that — there could have been no reason or possibility for mentioning that. Don't you think it was one of those things that is complete at one stroke?"

"I want to know what you really thought about it," said Fenn, with a sort of breathlessness, and gazing at her intently.

She did not laugh contemptuously, as he had feared she might. "It was so long ago," was her reply, "you can't expect my impres-

sion to be fresh; and it may not be best to say much about it, any way. I did n't think it was the wisest thing that could be done."

For a second time he had the premonition that a great crisis was at hand. "It was a terrible mistake!" he declared vehemently, feeling that the statement implied all his latent passion about her.

"Yes; as a matter of prudence, you may call it a mistake," said Anice, calmly. For a second time, the crisis had come to nothing.

"And you thought me a great fool?" he inquired, after a short, dazed pause at her mode of taking it.

"No. That would have been rather conceited. I did n't consider every young man under obligation to be an adorer. And I think I liked your sincerity, all things considered."

There was but one question more that Fenn could have put; and that was whether there had been any regret because of his announcement that he should not make love. The desire to know this tortured him; but

of course it was impossible to ask it. Thus the situation was presented, that her frank replies excited his importunate questioning tendency still more deeply.

He remained thinking; but, seeing that she waited for him to take the lead in returning to the horses, he unwillingly made a start. When they came to the rough places, he attempted to aid her, as before, but she thanked him, and went on by herself; it was not until she nearly stumbled to the ground, in the folds of her habit, that she took his hand. Fenn was filled with trepidation. Could it be that she was offended with him? He knew that to ask her that would simply place him at a fresh disadvantage, and he was forced to keep the doubt to himself; but how unlike was this return to the one he had half imagined as possible! When they had entered this secluded place, he had had a dim presentiment that the growing current of his feeling for her would carry away some barrier, and place them in a new relation; that it might, in fact, lead to some mutual discovery, for the sake of which they

would be willing to set aside everything else in the world, — so intoxicated was he. Their dialogue in the glade of the thrushes had seemed to him charged with intensive meaning, as if at any moment the great climax might come. Yet it had all passed away into the air, and nothing had happened ; except, perhaps, that he had forfeited something of her regard and confidence. He emerged from the solitude with the sensations of a man who has shouted aloud in his dreams, and waked to find his imaginary cry the exaggeration of a feeble moan.

VI.

A FORM was stirring among the tall blackberry bushes, when they regained the empty house, which was not that of Star or the Nameless Gray. It proved to be the noxious student with eyes like a bug's, who had inconvenienced the Fenns at the tea-table, two evenings before, and was now browsing upon the vines with joyless diligence.

He looked up, saw them both, recognized Fenn, and resumed his eating.

"How did that insect ever get up here?" wondered the chemist. "Can it be his *habitat?*" And he was smitten with an unpleasant apprehension as to the rumors which might find their way to the hotel from this source. He made haste to lead up Star for Anice to mount.

"You will dine with us, won't you?" she said, when they had ridden a little way. Her cheerfulness was returning.

Fenn had an uneasy belief that he ought not to go again so soon; but he could not resist.

"Thank you," he said. "That will be much pleasanter than waiting alone at the hotel."

They did not talk much on their way to the farm, but whatever the slight cloud had been which had floated between them, it was gone now; and this was enough for Fenn. This woman, who had so enthralled him, had already become his conscience. If she was not offended, he did not care what other power or being might condemn him.

Mr. Evans was at dinner, and to be alone with them in this way carried the young man back to the situation of eight years ago. The elder man's aspect was precisely what it had been at that time; he may have had a few more wrinkles and become a little dryer in the skin, but he gave the impression of having been thinly coated over with some preservative gum, which produced a wonderful semblance of arrested maturity that could not alter. Hitherto, Fenn had been aware

that Anice and himself had grown older, sadder; that the texture of their characters was more complex, and a correspondence of sympathies less surely to be relied upon. But to-day Mr. Evans's air of permanence and fresh conservation put all this in the light of an illusion. Fenn was inspired to be as young and free as he had been long ago.

As if he, too, shared in this glamour of the moment, and felt bound to trust the young people to their own devices, the father retired soon after dinner, leaving his daughter and her admirer alone. They talked of his profession, for a while: Anice becoming seriously interested in his account of what he had already done, of his ambitions, and the interest of his studies; and she in her turn revealed, with greater certainty and a more hopeful eagerness than during their talk in the woods, her own wish to become something more than a creature of social accident, an after-thought of fate.

"Have you ever thought of using your voice on the stage?" Fenn asked, with an absorbed air.

"Oh, often. I don't underrate the difficulty of success in that art," said she; "but it seems too easy a thing for me individually to enter into. I have the voice, and it may be some of the dramatic gift. But if I failed, I should have lost nothing: I should still be a person of society in New York, with opportunities for entertaining others and being entertained myself. I want to make a sacrifice. If I do anything, it must be an attempt in which failure would be very painful or ridiculous."

"Ah, you don't know what you are speaking of, Anice," he returned, using her name unconsciously, in the concentration of his thoughts. "With us who have to succeed in order to live at all, there is no need of piling on the agony by making more difficulties than will come naturally."

The sound of her name, which he had never uttered before, was welcome to her, much as she might have imagined she would reprove his using it. It struck a slumbering chord. "Ah," she sighed, "that necessity for struggle, — that is what I lack! You

don't know what it is to have no one to struggle for or with. I suppose I 'm wasting my strength on a chimerical idea of what I would like to do. But — what is there to live for ? "

It was hard for a man to hear this, who found himself all at once ready to tell her to live for his own admiration or devotion. Fenn was greatly agitated.

" Sing for me, — sing for me," he begged, in a stifled voice, rising and going to the piano.

She obeyed. He could not have given her a better injunction. In dreamy succession she recalled and wafted through the room melodies of Abt and Franz and Jenssen and Schumann, poetic and impassioned yet infinitely soothing, which seemed to lift both her and her listener into a more noble and a serener atmosphere.

> " Lean, love, oh lean thy cheek on mine,
> And let our hot tears flow together."

These words from one of the songs, shrouded in dim German syllables, unloosed those

bonds that tie people down to their own personality: all the anguish and the holy sorrow of doomed or breaking hearts everywhere flowed through the young man, as, with some leaves of music held vacantly in his hands, he sat there and let the yearning harmony steal upon him.

If they could not exist together otherwise, they could live together for a time in this echoing world of music; and the flood of emotion it brought did not weaken Fenn, — it was purifying.

When the last strain was over he determined to go. Anice remained motionless at the piano; he went towards her, and said, "Thank you." Tears were coming into her eyes, but she looked up at him. Impulsively he took her hand, touched it lightly with his lips, and left her. She did not stir; and in a few moments she heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs dying away on the bend of the road.

Arrived at his room, he plunged swiftly into his work, writing letters, making esti-

mates, going through long calculations; and sooner than he expected the results were ready for mailing to Boston. He took his packets over to the little store scented with molasses and soap, where the dignity of the government was represented by a cage of letter-boxes; then he returned to the hotel entrance, and in a short time had the luxury of seeing the Athol stage arrive, jouncing on the top of its dusty red body a leather-colored suit of clothes in which the driver was encased, and several new holiday travelers.

He wondered when Ethel would return. He did not feel in the least wicked, though he was under peculiar excitement, and he looked forward with entire equanimity to encountering his wife. I shall not pretend to decide whether this indicated a hardened conscience. To what he knew were the conventional requirements he so far deferred as to hold a scattered discussion with himself, during the intervals of watching the stage and the lazy movements of people about the house or in the street. But this discussion

was very one-sided. He persuaded himself that the world at large could not understand his particular situation, and therefore had no right to impose upon him arbitrary restrictions calculated on too rough a scale. What had he done? He loved his wife; but could he not love Anice in another way? Poets had been praised for such wealth of passion, and by enlarging it had contributed vastly to the delight and elevation of later generations. Society must trust the individual more, he told himself. Neither Goethe's theory of a law of attraction, which Anice and Ethel had both condemned, nor the world's theory of absolutely excluding mysterious unions like this which had grown up between himself and Mrs. Eulow, could be right. There must be a middle ground, where one could walk safely and with truth.

This conclusion was much more moderate than the impetuous and reckless visions of that morning, during the ride with Anice. He did not notice the fact; but doubtless the relief of knowing that he had not repelled Anice, and the triumph of kissing her

hand at parting, had steadied and given poise to his blind longings, and convinced him that he was satisfied with so much liberty.

It was dusk when Ethel returned with the picnic party. Fenn went forward buoyantly, helped her to alight, and, in the spontaneous pleasure of having her with him again, kissed her on the forehead under protection of the falling darkness.

"You have been a long time," he said. It even seemed to him that he entertained a new tenderness for her.

"It has been so delicious," she went on to tell him, as they made their way up-stairs. "The trees come down to the lake all the way around, and make it lovely; and then we went out sailing, and Mr. Sharon Reeves caught some little bits of fish, — the tiniest you ever saw, — in a row-boat; and we had *such* fun with the lemonade and the ice and getting all the things ready. And, oh, Ben, the Pincotts were there, and what do you think? Mr. Pincott painted a beautiful little picture of the lake, while we watched him; and when I told him how much I liked it he

said he would make me a copy for myself. He wanted that one for a study, but he's going to make me a present of the one he paints from it. Is n't that nice?"

"Yes," said Fenn; "but I shall ask him to do it as a commission."

"Oh, how delightful!" exclaimed Mrs. Fenn, in a miniature rapture. "Our first order to a painter! But I'm afraid you can't afford it, Ben."

"No, I can't. But neither can Pincott afford to give away his pictures. I 'm afraid he has a hard time of it, supporting his family."

"Well, you have a pretty hard time, too, dear. But it 's real kind and good of you to want to pay him."

"I would like to own it that way," said her husband candidly, and fully meaning what he said, "because then I can feel that I 've had some share in your happiness to-day."

Ethel was touched. "That is generous," she said, coming close to him, and putting her head against his shoulder. (They were

now in their room.) "Do you know, Ben, I missed you dreadfully, and at first I thought I ought not to have gone without you. I was so sorry, thinking of you all alone here."

"Ah, but I have n't been alone all the time," he returned, gayly.

"Did you get through your work?"

"Yes. But first I had a horseback ride."

"With Mrs. Eulow?" Ethel guessed, at once; and as she saw the surprised affirmative in his face, she went on, "I 'm so glad! Then you had a pleasant time, too."

She patted his bearded cheek with her small hand, as if he were a novel and mysterious object, and she were anxious to find out whether the pleasant time had worked any change in him, that contact would disclose.

Fenn was driven to make excuses. "I enjoyed it very much: but my first idea in getting the horse was to go after you and spend the day at the lake."

"Why did n't you? I 'm sorry you had any second idea, if that was your first."

"Well, I felt rather blue; and then there was the long ride to be taken alone; and I did n't feel sure you cared much about it."

"Oh, never think that, Ben, if I *am* cross," said she, with a charming reproachfulness. "But I 'm glad you did what you felt like doing."

Fenn was hardly prepared for this cheerful ease. But although in his interior councils he judged that she would have felt very differently had she known the unspoken history of that day's emotions, he was extremely pleased at her behavior. It bade fair to allow him without a struggle all that liberty which he had been theorizing upon as desirable.

"We both seem to have been very sensible," he remarked, with a laugh.

"And the horseback riding is a very good idea," Ethel continued. "I believe I shall try it myself. Mr. Kingsmill and I were talking about it at the picnic, and he says there are no very good horses here, but he 's going to have two brought up from his uncle's at Worcester."

"Oh," responded her husband, not very

warmly. For a moment he suspected that this was retaliation, but he soon saw that it was no more than a coincidence. Moreover, it would be in accord with his theory. "What is this Kingsmill, any way?" he asked presently. "Has he any profession?"

"His uncle is his profession," said Ethel laughingly. "He has a large property, and Mr. Kingsmill is going to inherit it, — so Mrs. Dadmun tells me."

"And what does Mrs. Whidden say about it?"

"The same."

"Oh, then it must be true," said Fenn, with as much of a sneer as he thought the subject deserved. "Those females are two negatives, and two negatives, you know" —

"I rather like them, in their way," said his wife. "They 're not ill-natured, if they *are* gossipy."

"You would n't think so, if they happened to select us for an object," Fenn intimated. He strongly suspected that the much-bewrinkled Mrs. Dadmun and her scanty little friend would yet give him trouble.

"But I don't see," objected Ethel, "that their saying Mr. Kingsmill is going to inherit a lot of money is disagreeable, at all."

"No, it is n't. But that was n't the point, exactly."

They were not to be put out by differences of opinion this evening, however. They retained their good spirits. A tremendous political discussion took place among a group of gentlemen, in the course of the evening, founded on the morning's papers, in which most of the male boarders had been wrapped since the arrival of the stage; and they took great delight in advancing with all the vigor of originality the views contained in the latest editorials of their favorite sheets; but, singularly enough, no one seemed to be aware of the transparency of this process. One elderly merchant, who at home never read less than six newspapers a day, and generally as many as ten, had in his present remote abode been reduced to a meagre diet of two, and his intellect, in consequence, gave unmistakable signs of shrinkage. Another had been careful to subscribe to opposite partisan organs,

for the campaign then pending ; and, being unable to make up his mind, from the information they gave, that either side was fit to be trusted, he acceded, during the progress of an hour's talk, to nearly every proposition made by the rest of the disputants, and opposed in rotation each one that he had acceded to. But most of the controversialists had a very simple conception of national affairs, which was that there was a party of atrocious evil, and another so pure and beautiful as to have risen to the summit of human possibilities; and they invariably considered themselves to belong to the second, to which they gave either name they liked best. But even this assumption did not prevent any of them from admitting that their own party had been guilty of indescribable corruption.

In all this Fenn thought he saw a reflection of the false side of society and human nature, — the same side which would oppose itself to his new opinions concerning the relations of men and women. At all events, if these opinions were deceptive they derived support from the obvious self-delusion of

such politics; and the young chemist found himself straying off into speculation as to whether much of the hypocrisy of certain phases in American life — swindling, embezzlement, and false pretenses in churches — be not aided by the readiness of the people to depend on the factious perversions and crude exaggerations of their political men and sundry of their journalistic prophets. From time to time he joined in the *mêlée* of alarms as to a new Southern war, charges of unconstitutionality, assertions of corruption, local or central tyranny, and clashing financial policies; and, although he had not read the papers of the morning, he astonished the others by a little freshness and force of insight. But the amount of sham in the subject had a bad effect on him.

VII.

The next day rose in cold bluster and rain. The Institute became a scene of desperate idleness; the wet wind groaned along its wooden sides, shaking blind and sash monotonously; and the boarders not only groaned but also yawned. Imprisoned in the commonplace hostelry, Ethel began to find even Kingsmill wearisome; and he was wise enough to retreat. She then had recourse, in company with other ladies, to the solace found in working out the soft perplexities of crochet. But Fenn was weighed down by a reaction from the excitement of the previous afternoon. Reading, games in the parlor, the society of a Dadmun or a Whidden, and of Miss Ibbot and Miss Hamill, were ineffectual to dispel his gloom and weariness. As a last resort, and to relax the stiffness that came from his ride, he got out some rubber boots, and went for a long walk through the

wind that still spun across the ridge and slashed the air with sudden bursts of rain like fringed whips. But he set himself resolutely towards the quarter directly opposite to where Anice was. When he came back, late in the afternoon, drenched, glowing and limber, Ethel showed him a note which had been brought up for her by a glistening man in an open cart.

It was from Mrs. Eulow. "If Mr. Fenn is too busy to bring you down," it said, "why can you not spend the day with me to-morrow, if it clears?"

Nothing had been said about his expecting to be busy, and the inference was perforce that it would be judicious for him to become so.

"You will go, of course," he said.

"Yes; I expect to enjoy it immensely."

Fenn did not mind this incident much, at first; but before long it began to annoy and puzzle him, and by the night he was consumed with a wish to accompany his wife, and see Anice once more.

At about ten in the morning, Ethel went

out, prettily dressed in a dove-like suit, to keep the appointment, and he was left to himself. Ordinarily it would not have been hard for him to find employment for a few vacant hours; and, in fact, having come to the country to rest, it would have been sufficient occupation to lie on the ferns under the shady side of a rock and watch the changing shadows and colors of the hills, had his mind been at ease. But he could not compose himself to anything passive. He was obliged to attach himself to Miss Ibbot and Miss Hamill, who, being in several particulars good contrasts for each other, — Miss Ibbot pale and her friend pink, for example, — had grouped themselves together effectively for the summer. Kingsmill approaching after a time, the deserted husband proposed a game of lawn tennis, and they all went out to the rough sward behind the Institute, where the netting was spread. Fenn came to the conclusion that Kingsmill was a gallant, amiable, and harmless young aristocrat; but the game did not interest him. If it had been dismal work passing a stormy day out of

Anice's society, it was still more tedious to undergo this exile under a clear sky. The odor of the hot grass, the well-modulated cries of satisfaction or dismay from the two young ladies, and Kingsmill's painfully scientific play, all wearied the chemist, instead of refreshing him.

They returned to the house for an uninteresting dinner, and then Fenn took a volume of history, and went out to an arbor which stood on a rise beyond the croquet-ground, amid the parched remains of what had once been a flower-garden. He smoked cigarettes and kept his finger in the book, but did not read a word: he had discovered that he could see the roof of the farm-house from the arbor.

Between four and five o'clock he marched in a straight line for the roof, descended the bank, and presented himself at the door.

"You are late," said the widow, coming out with Ethel; "but still you are too early for Mrs. Fenn to go. Why, did n't you let us see a little of you before?"

Fenn was astounded. "I found so much

to do"—he began, mendaciously, his dignity so much offended that truth would no longer protect it. "Do you mean to say you expected me sooner?" he recommenced, turning from one to the other of the two women.

"I'm sure I did n't," said Ethel, provokingly, but with a mollifying good-humor in her eyes. "We 've been so busy talking and embroidering and reading and singing that I did n't notice the time."

"No, it was n't on our account I meant," said Anice, with her arm in her friend's. "I thought you might come for your own sake."

"Well, here I am, at any rate," returned Fenn, grimly. He was positively raging within. "There 's no knowing how long I may be at your service, Ethel," he added, with an attempt at a jesting tone, "so you 'd better seize the opportunity to go home with me now."

"Upon my word, he 's getting very lofty!" observed Ethel to Mrs. Eulow. "The men have been so political up at the hotel, lately, it 's too bad. You don't happen to know,

Ben, that Mrs. Eulow and I have been talking woman's rights, this afternoon."

"Ah? I'll strike my flag at once, then. Come, Ethel, we really must make haste." And accordingly the champion of feminine independence was taken away to get her things on.

Fenn was very silent on the way back. He thought he had been trifled with. For a time, he even admitted the suspicion that Mrs. Eulow had betrayed his indiscretion to his wife, and that the two had entered into a scheme for punishing him; his head was in a whirl, and he was minded to do something violent, but the situation was too hopelessly intangible and placid to furnish any chance for this. Ethel's recital of how the day had been passed convinced him that his suspicion was a foolish one. The widow and she had chatted quietly, had picked flowers, and done fancy-work; and then Anice had sung some plain little English and American songs, which Ethel liked. "But I did n't think she sang with much spirit," Mrs. Fenn commented. "I was n't nearly so much im-

pressed with her voice as I was the other day."

Her husband was secretly flattered: he considered this a proof that Anice could not sing so well out of his presence, or would not do her best for any one but himself. Nevertheless, her manœuvre in dispensing with him during the day remained inexplicable to him.

Mrs. Eulow's intention had, indeed, been a mixed one. Her recent scenes with Fenn had startled her; she instinctively sought some means for keeping him at greater distance without breaking their intercourse abruptly. She also felt a genuine interest in Ethel, and some curiosity to know her better; and to see her alone offered just the temporary protection she wanted. What she should do in the end she did not know; it was not part of her plan to dispense altogether with the peculiar relation which had so unexpectedly drawn the chemist and herself closer than they had ever been. It had come spontaneously; she had not willed it; it had as much power over her as it had over

him. The widow had already gone so far as to think, albeit with no cool deliberation, that she had a certain kind of right to some amends for the inconsiderate plainness with which he had banished sentiment from their view of each other, long ago. If he chose to import it at this late date, she would receive so much of it as might form a proper tribute, without letting it become an embarrassment or a source of pain to any one. It ought, fairly, to be said that she was as honest as most people are in intricate crises where their own passions or pride are actively engaged ; and she fancied that by strengthening a friendship with Ethel she would be able to conduct herself with justice towards her.

It is easy to see inconsistencies or mistakes when they are written down plainly, but it is quite another matter to read them as clearly in our own instinctive actions and feelings, or in the casual outside knowledge we get of those with whom we are going through the incidental and unshaped record of daily life.

The effect of Mrs. Eulow's precaution upon Fenn was dangerous. "If she is making fun of me, or using any artifice," he declared to himself, "I have ended with her!" He imagined that what she had done diminished his regard for her perceptibly. But, in reality, it only stung him into renewed excitement. His mind became fixed upon the aim of probing to the bottom the nature of her feeling for him.

In the quiet, sunless hours when Tanford slept, and the wide earth moved noiselessly, bearing along with it the grotesque hotel and all its inmates, and the little room where Fenn and Ethel lay, — that was the time when his passion grew. Alone with his wife, whom he would have cherished in any manifest sorrow as he would a dearly loved child, this dark infatuation asserted itself even more boldly than it might have done in her absence.

Through the open window floated the wandering perfume of night-scented balsams, in a garden by one of the meek village houses across the road, and the crickets trilled plain-

tively from farther away in the fields, as if with a prevision of summer's transitoriness; while, lying awake and motionless, Fenn's heart burned with anguish for the wife whom he began to see that he was partially wronging, and glowed with an insensate prepossession when he thought of Anice. Like the flower that delivered its sweetness only to the night, he yielded up his spirit in the darkness to this fatal passion more ardently than in the healthful brightness of daylight.

Ah, human nature, — prosaic, light-hearted, tear-bringing human nature! — how easily we take you up in our hands, and think we understand you; and how easily you evade us, because in you too there is a day-time and a night-time, and we cannot look upon you in both at once! Fenn had yet to learn that the man who persuades himself that he loves his wife at the same time that he is yielding to another woman's fascination stands in even more seductive peril than he who wholly loses his first affection, while aware of the pitfall prepared for him.

The storm, by confining the Dadmun and Whidden intellect to the house, had generated an atmosphere favorable to gossip. These ladies, with sundry others of a congenial kind who were present, came to the country annually to "recuperate," — a process in which so many women pass their entire lives; but they usually found so much charitable work awaiting them, in the way of regulating the behavior of their immediate neighbors, that it is doubtful whether they ever got much benefit from their migrations.

While Fenn had been playing tennis with Kingsmill and the young ladies, these regulators were stitching and knitting in the parlor. There was a piano there, which had worn out many young women of the winter academy, who had hammered away valuable hours on its faded key-board, and it had itself been nearly exhausted of tunefulness by these means; but the stiff young collegian, heretofore mentioned, was playing on it with a specious and unmeaning brilliancy.

"That young Gregg plays very nicely,"

remarked Mrs. Whidden. "I think it's a very good thing for young men; don't you?"

"Yes," said the other, catching a stitch.

"It keeps them," Mrs. Whidden began, "out of"—

"But I don't like them to play too much," interrupted Mrs. Dadmun, with a severe sense of what was desirable. She always knew exactly what was desirable for everybody.

"No?"

"Oh, no; not to be *musicians*." Mrs. Dadmun's tone was one of grave disapproval, to be justified only in a person whose standard of social dignity was rigid.

"Dear me, no," assented her friend. "But it's a specially nice accomplishment for young men. It occupies them, and keeps them out of"—

Mrs. Whidden here introduced a significant pause, a sort of blank form, which Mrs. Dadmun promptly filled up with an emphatic, "Oh, yes; yes!"

Having thus whetted their appetites by the contemplation of this innocent and ex-

emplary young man, they began to discuss the Fenns.

"It seems a little odd," said one of the other women in the group, "that Mr. Fenn should have stayed away from the picnic, and now here he is passing his time with young unmarried ladies, while his wife has gone away, apparently for the day."

Three days earlier, this same critic had been finding fault because the Fenns were so much wrapped up in each other, and did not join with a community of feeling in the life of the Institute. But that did not prevent a general ratification of the idea that they were at present going on very unwisely. Several nice ethical and social points were carefully debated, in this connection, and settled to the satisfaction of the group, but rather to the damage of Mr. and Mrs. Fenn.

The collegian of the vitreous eye, whose playing was so entirely mechanical that he had been able to attend to the whole conversation across the room, left the piano and came over to the gossips.

"Do any of you ladies know this Mrs. Eulow?" he asked in a scrannel voice.

"No," said Mrs. Dadmun, composing her wrinkles with comfortable disdain.

The rest remained silent, leaving it to be presumed that it was a great blessing that they did n't know her.

"Oh, I 'm sorry," said Gregg, dropping his eye-glasses. "I was hoping I should be able to get an introduction to her." The presumption of this gave a shock even to the critics who heard him. "I would like to know her very much," Gregg went on piping. "She is handsome, you know, — very." The ladies were rapidly becoming annoyed at Gregg. "I think I saw her yesterday, with Mr. Fenn," he concluded, reserving this for the last shot.

The junto, from being disdainful and displeased, became all alert. Some looked sharply at one another, and others exclaimed, "You did! Where?"

The noxious youth enjoyed his momentary power, though he pretended to be unaware of it. He contrived to impart very slowly the story of his discovering Fenn and the widow in their lonely excursion on the mountain.

It was only on sufferance, however, that he was admitted to the confidence of the group even far enough to give them this information; and when it was done, a tardy sense of the fitness of things caused him to glide away.

VIII.

THREE weeks passed, and during that period the watchful eyes of the feminine police had much to observe which was not at all what they would have any one suppose they liked; but, fortunately or unfortunately, they were a police without the power of arrest. Otherwise, they must inevitably have taken into custody not only Fenn and Mrs. Eulow, but Mrs. Fenn and Kingsmill, in addition.

Ethel was a person of little experience, who absorbed whatever came into her life that was agreeable, in an unconscious, dreamy way. She of course did not hesitate to take a drive with the fatherly Mr. Evans in his light buggy, but she had no greater fear of riding on horseback in company with Mr. Arthur Kingsmill. He, on his part, was a chivalrous young man, whose chief defect was that he required several square miles of

country, or a crowded drawing-room, to bring him into effective relief, but who took a reasonable and healthy delight in the society of an unaffected and pretty young married woman. When his uncle's horses came up from Worcester, he considerately placed them at the disposal of Fenn and his wife, in the beginning; and Ethel practiced a little with her husband, to regain her seat in the saddle. After this, there were one or two parties made, in which both they and Mrs. Eulow and Kingsmill joined. But it was not always easy to form a cavalcade of four at the same time; and even when they went out together, each pair was alone during so much of the ride that Ethel saw no remarkable difference between this and going with only Kingsmill.

But somehow it happened too frequently, after this custom had been adopted, that Fenn and Mrs. Eulow went out alone also, when there was no very good reason why they should not have joined the others. Besides, Ethel took her rides less often, and rather as a diversion forced upon her by Fenn's constant attentions to Mrs. Eulow.

When she stayed at home, however, there was no more escape for her from the strictures of her gossiping acquaintances than when she rode; for Kingsmill still managed to be near her most of the time; his customary attendance on her being now rendered more thoughtful by the compassion he began to feel at seeing her comparatively neglected by her husband.

Anice and her father had been invited to dine at the hotel two or three times, as a meagre recognition of their hospitality. They saw something more of the people there, and liked Kingsmill, who strolled over to the farm for tea with the Fenns. Mrs. Dadmun and some of her friends were asked to call, and always treated Mr. Evans and his daughter with distinguishing cordiality when they met: this gave them a soothing sense of justice in their subsequent severe condemnation of the widow, among themselves. For the four people under surveillance were of course mingling with the rest all the time, and underwent not even the mildest ostracism. There were more picnics, games of

tennis, small teas at different houses, groups of æsthetic talkers at Pincott's, in the evening; there was a choice of two churches on Sunday, and these being only half filled, Sharon Reeves was encouraged to organize an impromptu chapel at the Institute. There was an entertainment by the village dramatic club, in which "statuary" appeared against a screen of black cambric, in the glare of red or blue fire, while the audience was nearly suffocated with the smoke; and there were card parties and political discussions at the hotel. These were the social diversions, — not the most brilliant in the world, but still offering a good deal of entertainment and relaxation to people who knew how to use them, and who had had enough of stimulation and to spare during the town winters. But the best of the summer was in the rides, the drives, and the walks, — the last revealing the most things of natural interest and beauty in the surrounding territory; and, strange to say, those persons among the floating population who had traveled in Europe, and otherwise cultivated their sensibil-

ities to good purpose, were among the ones who appeared most contented with simple out-door enjoyment, watched for the wild American sunsets with the most eagerness; and found a source of pleasure in the homely barns filling with new hay, the drowsiness of the village, the occasional sheep and numerous cattle grazing on the strongly moulded hills, where perhaps a tall white birch rose up with classic slenderness to shadow them.

Pincott, whose gentle eyes had dwelt upon the rich impasting of color on Roman ruins and the delicate-tinted distances of the Campagna and the Alps, slipped lovingly and quietly as a sunbeam from nook to nook of these unstoried highlands, and, like the sunbeam, made a picture wherever he went. It was in the little parlor at his boarding-place, the walls of which he had coated with a glinting mail of color-studies, where Mrs. Pincott had also disposed bits of artistic needle-work and æsthetic fabrics to conceal the harsh barrenness of the rustic room, that there arose a short discussion, one evening, which had a special meaning for Fenn.

His wife was there, with Mrs. Eulow and Kingsmill; and by some chance the incongruous Mrs. Dadmun was also reposing her baggy skirts in one of the tapestried chairs. The talk turned for a moment to the instance of some distinguished artistic people abroad, among whom a singular affair had occurred; one man resigning his wife to another because he found that she loved his friend.

"I can't understand such a thing," said Mrs. Pincott.

"It could n't happen in this country," the artist observed. "And it seems to me that that proves the advantage of our freer manners. Where the safeguards are so much more strictly insisted upon, it results often in a violent reaction or an extraordinary assertion of liberty, now and then, among the people of greatest intellect and finest character."

"I never heard of a woman giving up her *husband* in that way," said Fenn, musingly. "It is a great deal harder to imagine that happening. Why is it?"

"Perhaps women are not so generous as men," hazarded Ethel, in a tone the distant, interior sadness of which roused her husband to wonder.

"Do you call it generous?" Mrs. Dadmun demanded, indignantly. She was scandalized that such a theme should be discussed at all. Matters of this kind, she held, should be deplored at great length, and with judicious dwelling upon details, in a select, confidential circle of women; but any approach to a philosophical consideration of them she resented as dangerous.

"I meant, taking it in the noblest sense, — supposing it to be done with pure self-sacrifice." Again Fenn was surprised. Could this be his ardent, prejudiced little wife who was speaking?

"It might be just as true," suggested Mrs. Eulow, "to say that they are more devoted, and that that makes them more exacting."

Ethel looked up at her gently and steadily, and smiled; but there was a strange pensiveness in the smile, though she seemed to be thanking Anice for what she had said.

Mrs. Pincott, who occupied neutral ground, rallied to the attack with, "Oh, it 's all wrong, very wrong. There is no way of excusing it."

"A woman who consents to such a very improper thing," asserted Mrs. Dadmun, the ribbons on top of her head frowning loftily as she spoke, "can have no heart. She is not worthy the name."

"I think that 's too harsh," said Fenn. "Might n't it be possible that she loved her husband and his friend both, but in different ways?"

"If she did, she 'd better have just turned the ways around, then," said the regulator of society, aptly enough. "But really, Mr. Fenn, I don't see what good these questions do. I can't talk of it."

Pincott yielded to a malicious desire to plague her. "Men," he said, taking up a drawing with which he meant to change the subject, "have been known to be in love with two women at once, or to fancy they were."

He had no share in the current gossip of

the hotel, and was innocent of any design to reach Fenn with his remark; but the chemist, who was looking at him at the instant, turned cold. His glance moved quickly towards Anice, and from the half shadow where she sat she returned it with a deep gaze, in which he fancied a soft warmth flashed.

It was the first intimation he had had, since the day of the thrushes' song, that she was not using her power over him in a luxurious cruelty. After Ethel's visit to her alone, he had sought in vain for a renewal of that day's mood: he had received no new pressure of the hand, upon which he could fasten, nor any clear glance of meaning, known only to themselves, though undefined. He had hovered on the borders of a tempting intimacy, interrupted now and then by pangs of doubt and a sense of unsatisfactoriness; agitated and increasingly captivated; but now the intoxicating certainty of that memorable afternoon seized him again. He awoke from this second's revery to hear Mrs. Dadmun saying conclusively, —

"Occupation, — that is what such people need. It keeps them out of — out of" — And, having thus put forward Mrs. Whidden's blank form, she paused.

"Heaven knows," said Mrs. Pincott, helping her along, "artists have plenty of occupation."

But if Mrs. Dadmun, who was thinking of Mrs. Whidden's remarks in connection with young Gregg, could have had her way, she would doubtless have prescribed for Fenn a term of hard labor at the exhausted Institute piano.

Kingsmill had said nothing.

It was an instance of the coarse injustice of our system of judging people, that Kingsmill and Ethel were placed by the feminine police in the same category with Fenn and Anice. These inquisitors imagined that the wife was retaliating on the husband, and that Arthur Kingsmill was taking an unfair advantage of the situation.

He himself supposed that Ethel was blind to the progress of her husband's infatuation. The gossips were in error about him, and he was mistaken in regard to her.

Sanity, so long as it is not stolid, is deeper than insanity; and jealousy, fatal though it may be, is a disease which works in the surface region of character. Ethel was not jealous. She did not even give way to hatred of the woman who she saw was drawing Benjamin Fenn farther and farther away from her. She had loved Mrs. Eulow from the first; they had soon learned to call one another "Anice" and "Ethel," and the young wife felt that the widow was an enlarging influence upon her, which she was glad to have When she detected the growth of that attraction which was swaying Anice towards her husband, her intuitive justice and strong sense of mercy prevented any malignant change in her regard for her new friend: it did not surprise her that Anice should love him. She loved him herself too bitterly well, in the depths of her sweet and vigorous nature, to be astonished; and — so far as it was possible — she forgave her. Neither was she jealous of her husband. Her agony was far more terrible than that. It was a silent, unutterable, radical grief,

that seemed to be gradually altering the whole substance of her being, as one can imagine the soft, plant-bearing earth hardening into metal through slow ages, in the midst of hardening rock. A convulsion and change of primeval scope and vast duration, one might say, were compressed for her into a few days of suffering. There was no weakness in her acceptance of the situation. Sharp and racking revolt was hers, at times, and it seemed as if the end of the earth had come; but she had a sublime native fortitude, the extent of which she had not known till now. Once when she was a girl of about twelve, she had been with her father on a steamer in Long Island Sound, and a collision had occurred with a collier. Every one supposed they would sink: people ran for life-preservers, some even jumped overboard, and most of the female passengers huddled together, shrieking. She fully comprehended what awaited her, but remained perfectly dumb, with a look of far-reaching anguish in those trusting eyes and in the face which had that faintly rustic expression; and she held

on to her father's hand with an intense farewell in the grasp. But ah, how different was the present horror! Her father was long since dead, and there was not even a hand to hold in token of her parting from all that made life dear.

To say that she bore all this without showing a single trace of it would not be literally true; but the signs were so indistinct as to escape all observers, excepting Anice, possibly, who had begun vaguely to awake to the doom that was settling down upon Mrs. Fenn. Her trouble showed in her eyes. It was not that there was a cloud in them, exactly; but sometimes you see a soft blue lake darkened by a cloud in the sky, and it was a shadow of woe resembling this that overgloomed her gaze, seeming every moment to pass away, yet returning, and never discovered by Fenn in his preoccupation.

She sat, one afternoon, on the high balcony above the hotel colonnade, listless and unemployed. In the drowsy silence, an occasional rapid carriage would suddenly be heard at a little distance, would fly by with a buzz

and rattle, and would pass out of hearing in the other direction. Sometimes the vehicles crossed each other in front of the hotel. They came and went so unexpectedly that they seemed to start up out of the ground for the express purpose of amusing her dull attention, and then to sink into it again, so that they might repeat the performance. Then she watched the slow life of the post-office store, where dullness and deliberation reached a climax bordering on the sublime. Yet she knew that there was a quick brain inside of the small establishment, a mind of local enterprise, such as it was, and she thought of the care and energy involved in the business; all the anticipations, too, and petty excitements and droll bargaining attending the purchases made there by the country folk. She tried to think of their existence in all the vivid actuality it had for them, and wondered if they were happy. There was a wagon without a driver standing at the store steps. There seemed to be always a wagon there. "If I should die," she mused, "it would go on standing there

just the same." This contrast of ideas struck her very oddly, and the image of the ugly wagon seemed to give a singular hideousness to the thought of death. The next moment she made a desperate effort to throw aside all belief in the unhappiness that encompassed her, but it would not be shaken off; and she began to resolve that if she must lose Ben, or even lose his love and not his presence, it would be better to kill herself than to go on enduring. Fortunately, a few tears fell and relieved the stricture at her heart. The afternoon was waning; her husband was still absent, taking a walk with Mrs. Eulow, from which Ethel had excused herself because she longed for a little solitude in which to face her misery. There could not be any solitude, however, she found: even here on the balcony she was crowded upon, oppressed by other presences. Nor could she face the future and try to give it any probable shape: it must all remain vague and dreary.

A little boy was passing in the street, and

some people in a garden called out, "What time does the church say, bub?"

He looked long and attentively at the church-clock. At length he drawled, "One hand's way up, and t' other's most straight down."

"Six? No, it must be five," concluded the questioners, too much enervated by the heat to look for themselves. A moment later, the bell struck, clear and solemn.

Ethel was laughing, in spite of her wretchedness, at this mode of telling time, when the warning notes from the tower rang out, and seemed to quiver through her, summoning her back to her agony.

"I cannot bear this! I will not!" she exclaimed, under her breath, and bringing her hands together in a close knot. "I have rights, and I will make Ben remember them. He does not know what he is doing. Oh!" she moaned, and then passed into silent thought again: "I have been too lenient, too forgetful of myself. And then, Anice, — she has conscience; she will listen to me and bring this to an end."

But, for the twentieth time, she found herself unable to remain firm in any design of interposing or appealing, or claiming her rights. The stoicism, enshrouded where no one suspected it, in the centre of her heart, restrained her.

There are people, in meeting whom we are buoyed up to the surface like corks, floating on the wave of casual talk, and unable to get down into profundities of any kind, however much we may see of them. There are others with whom we tend at once towards the core ; it was so with Anice and Fenn. They conversed on large themes, speculating upon society, love, the work of women, poetry, and belief. That in itself might have been very well, but everything they said had an indirect, veiled reference to themselves as they now stood, and to their mutual regard. The nature of this regard they did not openly inquire into, but they continually touched the edge of such inquiry in a furtive way, speedily recoiling again. Partly to satisfy the taste for intellectual subjects, and partly also to place some object of attention in the

way of this tendency to probe each other's state of mind too directly, they liked to carry a book or magazine with them, in walking, and to diversify the exercise with reading in some sheltered border of the woods.

On this afternoon they had come up by the path through that rocky pasture where Fenn had had his strange experience of believing that Anice had pressed his hand, in getting over the wall; and they settled upon the place under the oak where he had first heard her voice with its echo, to rest in.

They had with them a little volume of Shakespeare, containing Much Ado, from which they read alternately. Fenn took the second act. Suddenly he stopped, after reciting these words: —

> "For beauty is a witch
> Against whose charms faith melteth into blood."

"Is that always true?" he asked, doubtfully, letting the book drop into a neglected position, as he commanded Anice's attention.

"You ask me to revise Shakespeare's judgment?" she returned.

"Certainly not; it is only what Claudio says in a hasty moment, when he's surprised. But I like to weigh how much truth there is in it."

"I don't think a woman can tell. I don't think *I* can."

"Yet you are very beautiful."

There was a moment of perfect silence, during which Fenn's ears rang. He could hardly tell why he had said this.

They looked into each other's eyes steadily. "Mr. Fenn," said Anice, when that silent parrying had spent itself, "I can't afford to lose a friend."

"I don't see why I should n't say it," he answered, doggedly, looking at the book. "It is true; and I do not believe that such beauty melts away the impalpable but persistent thing called faith, — though these lines are wonderful, and express the power of a beautiful woman as a poet would naturally do it."

He had managed to turn the point of her rebuke; and besides, she was secretly influenced by that centripetal attraction which

would not let them remain on the safe exterior of things.

"Are poets so much more faithless than other men?" she asked. Then, as he did not at once reply, she went on to say: "The power of a beautiful woman, which you speak of, is not entirely her own, you know. After a certain point, it is what the person upon whom it falls makes it."

"Then why should n't any honest man be able to feel and respond to those charms, without letting them work witchcraft in his blood?" cried Fenn, in a glow; yet at that very instant the stream of passion in his veins was dissolving his faithfulness. "That is what I believe in: the establishing of a clear relation of admiration and devotion, where a man may be more than a common friend, and yet" — He did not know how to finish.

"I understand," said Anice in a low voice, that vibrated like the note of some instrument of fabled sweetness. "I believe in such a thing. I think it is possible."

They allowed their glance to wander away

into the placid scene before them, where the land dipped towards Swallow Pond, and rose again, melting away to a curtain of haze in which one rank of receding mountains stood beyond another. Somewhere in the deep valleys far away, it seemed to Fenn that there must be a place where he could find a new life, — a place so secluded that no rumor of conscience could reach him there ; and a desire seized him which belied what he had just been saying, to be lost in such a retreat with Anice.

"I don't know really what is meant by a Platonic affection," he continued, languidly, half closing his eyes as he looked at the mountains. "But this that I mean needs no artificial name, subject to sneers and misconstruction ; and it has nothing to do with any philosopher. It will come to be recognized, after a while, as something warmer and more real than that, yet" — A second time he was at a loss for terms, and let his voice die.

Anice had thrilled with an unreasoning joy, in which triumph and tenderness were blended, when he had begun describing the

relation which was really meant to represent their own. She could not tell precisely what she wished that to be. And now a faintness, a gathering desolation, began to come over her. What did it mean? She did not know whether she was glad or sorry; there was a kind of anger in her at the whole situation, — and yet was not this because Fenn was not free? She trembled. To have answered herself would have been to risk losing his friendship, because in the light of a positive decision her conscience might have forbidden her to continue it. She could not reprove him for what he had said, either; anger, or any emotion, would be unsafe.

"I don't believe we will read any more," she said, after a brief deliberation. "I must go back soon and get ready."

Fenn glanced at her questioningly. "For what?" he asked.

"I am going to Boston to-morrow."

"You are going away!" he demanded, thunderstruck. "And why to Boston?"

She smiled. "Only for a day or two," she explained. "There is a friend of mine, a

lady, who was to come up from Newport and be in Boston for two or three days, and this will be my only chance to see her."

"Your father will go with you, of course," propounded Fenn, out of sorts at the prospect.

"No," said Anice, faltering. "He is afraid of the heat."

The chemist's heart bounded. To go with her! — it was like a response to that stifled yearning he had had that they might escape together into some hazy distance. "Will you allow me to be your escort?" he asked, with an effort to be simply formal.

"Oh, Ethel must n't be left; I could n't think of your doing it!" exclaimed Mrs. Eulow. "Besides, there 's no reason why I should n't travel alone. It is very easy."

"I have some business there that I ought to attend to," said Fenn. "I had been thinking about it, but did n't want to go."

She needed no explanation as to what it was that had held him here. But she hesitated.

"Well?" said he, waiting for her answer.

Anice looked at him in a kind of fear.

"I shall probably go in the next train after yours, any way," he declared. "Would n't it be better for me to be at hand, in case I might be of use?"

"Very well; I shall be glad if you will," she responded, but without energy. She felt that she was a coward.

But the cowardice had been in letting him know at all that she was going.

Fenn told his wife, in the evening, that he had engaged a place on the stage, and was going to town on business. "It happens very luckily, too," he added, with factitious ease, "that Anice wants to go down, too, to meet a friend of hers."

Ethel gave a muffled cry.

He turned from his task of throwing some things together for the journey, acutely alarmed. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, no, no! I can't let you go!" she exclaimed, with indescribable pain in her voice, and putting both hands on his shoulders, as if to assure herself that he was not already gone. Her fair young figure was

alive with terror, and the light downy eyebrows were puckered in sharp lines upon her forehead.

Fenn became peculiarly calm. "Ethel, what does this mean?" he asked, in a tone as if he were drawing his breath in while he spoke.

She came to herself, like one who has been sleep-walking. Her face relaxed. "Oh, don't think anything of it," she said, softly, smiling. "It was only a sudden feeling I had that I might never see you again."

"Poh," said he, "that was foolish." He kissed her, and said tenderly, "Dear Ethel." Then he seemed to consider, and went to his hand-valise. "Shall I stay?" he asked. "Would you rather?"

"No. If you have business, I must not keep you," she answered, with restored calmness.

IX.

It was September now, and for two nights some invisible incendiary had been at work applying the torch of autumn to a tree or a bough, here and there. In the fresh, dewy haze of morning, the glowing foliage lit the village street and the long post-road, and the green-cloaked stretches of the country on either hand, with spots and spires of magical color.

When the stage drove up to the hotel, with Mrs. Eulow balanced in a desirable place on the top, there were, fortunately, not many of the remaining boarders at hand to notice that Fenn was going with her. Ethel was there, nevertheless, herself soft as September, in her leaf-tinted *créplisse;* rosy, calm, and sweet. She bade them good-by with many good wishes, and then they drove off through the lovely and inspiring landscape. The drive to the railroad was long, but it swept them

through many rich contrasts of scene, and they did not tire of it. Both were singularly buoyant. There was a stimulus of romance within them which was as exhilarating as the drive. Fenn took a peculiar and, as he thought, innocent pleasure in the idle fancy that he might be running away with this beautiful woman seated beside him. His secret impulse of yesterday, to escape with her into some distant recess of the mountains, had frightened him; but that did not assail him at present; and as long as he was not really running away with her, what harm could it do to pretend to himself that he was? It was the essence of this new kind of love, which he had invented, to indulge such bright hallucinations. He flattered himself that he had plucked the most delicate flower of history, in learning to cherish a passion without any of that fatal turmoil which, in the earlier evolution of love, caused so many clashing and tragical incidents. If Paris had been content with coming to the court of Menelaus, and falling in love with Helen, he might have even declared his position; that

at least would have been a satisfaction to both her and himself; but if he had stopped at that point no ten years' tragedy of the Trojan war would have trailed its length of disaster through the annals of the time. A few excursions with Helen into the country, if imaginatively treated, might have sufficed, and many lives would have been spared.

I don't mean to say that Fenn drew this contrast quite so lightly; but he felt the analogy that Anice was his Helen, and that he could enjoy the excitement of carrying her off without assuming the wrong.

When at last they were snugly bestowed in the train, absorbed in each other and talking in low tones, other persons in the car, he was conscious, might take them for lovers.

This fanciful recreation, however, had a curious effect. When they arrived in Boston, and he had put her into a carriage to go to her friend's, and was walking away by himself, he found that under this thin mask of imaginary elopement his brain had automatically prepared a complete plan for flight with Anice, which now presented itself in all its details.

From that moment he was engaged in a fierce struggle with himself against the desire to propose it to her. He had promised to come and see her at the house where she was staying, and there the opportunity for broaching his treacherous scheme was offered so exactly in the nick of time that he almost yielded to the temptation. He had also to go about the city a little with Anice and her friend, the next day. It forced itself upon him continually. They were already out of the reach of observation; there need be none of the struggle and horror of breaking away clandestinely from the spot where his wife was. Why should they not make use of the fact? Their destiny or doom — whichever it might be called — was seemingly fixed; sooner or later they must be united in some way, no matter what destruction might come of it. He saw that *his* passion, at least, was no longer a plaything; it had become an overmastering reality.

On the third day, which was to be that of their return, Anice's friend had left town. The widow had gone to a hotel. Fenn went

there to meet her, and found her in a small parlor. They had some little time to wait before starting for their train. He was under a fatalistic impression that he would not leave the room until she had either accepted his declaration and agreed to go away with him, or else thrown him aside altogether. He had thought of Ethel; he would arrange so that she should be cared for. He must stake all upon this issue.

He walked about nervously, speaking in short sentences and with great constraint. At last he said, with a sort of violence, "I wish you were never going back to Tanford!"

"What can you mean?" asked Anice. But she knew. She trembled with the knowledge.

Watching her fixedly, he observed this. "Anice," he said, "give me your hand a moment."

"You forget, Mr. Fenn! I am Mrs. Eulow." Her tone was firm, but it was hardly severe enough.

"Yes, that is what I forget," he cried vehe-

mently. "And I wish to forget it! To me you are Anice only, — the woman whose voice haunted me and drew me on, years ago, when I ought to have obeyed its spell, and put my life under its command. Do not call me back to the present; let me go on living in that time."

The widow's self-control was shaken. Either from mercy or some other sentiment, she could not strike him then with the cold steel of duty. "You must not speak to me of that," she said, with a hurrying accent of grief. "Oh why, why do you do it?"

"Did you not tell me yourself, that you would rather think of our friendship of those days than of what has happened since?" he returned passionately. "I needed no urging. I have thought of it too much for my peace, and I cannot conceal any longer — I" — His voice became constricted. He walked the room as if caged, clutching his hands together, and tearing them apart, roughly. Then he stopped near her again, and bent over her with such a gaze as if, half-blinded

by the whirl of his emotions, he could not see her at all unless he fairly pierced her with his eyes. "Anice," he said, "the fruition of your life is not yet come: you did not love Eulow as you might have"—

"Oh, I will not hear it!" she burst forth, tumultuously. She struggled from her place, but as she rose he caught her hand. For a second or two it seemed to relax and yield itself to his, as a bird tired of flight might have done; but she drew it away, and crossed the floor. "If I said anything to you about the error of my marriage, it was a trust which you must not violate." She stood there near the embrasure of a window, panting, with mingled tears and lightnings in her eyes. He, too, stood motionless, but with a heaving breast. "Do you know what you are doing or saying?" she went on. "Is this the ideal adoration you planned? You are ruining it all."

"That is not enough," he answered, in a tone growing clear and level from the intensity of his purpose. "It was beautiful, but it must give way to something greater. It was only the mould"—

"What would you have?" she demanded, as if disdaining to allow any further vagueness or debate.

It seemed to Fenn as if she were within his grasp.

The stream of human passion is poured out from unseen sources like a living fire, but hardens on the top in a thin lava surface, upon which we walk in all the security of convention. It needs only a narrow seam to let the burning reality jet upward and melt away the crust we are treading. A few words had placed these two on a totally altered footing.

"I would have a new future," said Fenn, advancing. "What if my life, too, has not reached its true fruition? The world is wide. Development is the supreme law."

But as he drew nearer to her, she looked so unprotected, it seemed so ruthless to have struck aside all the defenses of her integrity, which till then he had respected, that a sudden sense of shame assailed him. He remembered that she had come here under his escort, and he knew that he was doing his

manhood wrong in taking advantage of the fact. Yet he would probably have persisted, had it been left to him.

On her part, she saw this strong man swayed by her, — the man she had most admired of any she had known. Though the final word had not been uttered, he might be hers by the slightest motion, — the dropping of her eyelids, the touch of a hand, — or by mere silence and passivity.

She lifted her hands to her face, to shut away the sight. "Leave me; do not speak again," she groaned, with an effort that might have betrayed to a calmer listener that she was doing violence to her inclination, — "or I shall *hate you!*"

Fenn recoiled. The words struck a blow that riveted home the shame which had already partially fettered him. There was the mortification in them attaching to a positive rejection of all that he had meant to say; for he had actually said enough for her to understand him. In her capacity of conscience to him — the only conscience that still controlled him — she had the power thus to let

in upon him a rush of humiliation at his error and remembrance of his faithlessness to Ethel; and most deeply of all he suffered from the disgrace of having risked too much with her.

She turned aside, and looked blindly out of the window; and he remained silent and stricken where he was. The minutes passed by and fell away like drops distilled from a silent and wasting grief. In a changed voice he asked, at length, "Do you despise me?"

Facing him again slowly, she surveyed him for an instant. "I cannot, — I cannot," she murmured in a tremulous tone. Then, recovering her resolution, she added, "But we must not see each other again."

Fenn bent his head, without knowing what a pang it gave her to see him do so. But, with a rallying hope, he raised his face presently. "You will not do that?" he pleaded. "It cannot be!" he continued, gathering determination. "Think once more, if I merit anything so doubly bitter. Don't decide it, now, for I must submit to whatever you com-

pel; but consent to think, and decide after you get to Tanford."

"We must go there together, of course," she said, with the languor that follows a forced act of duty. "And then"— She shielded her face again by looking out of the window; but decision had vanished from her attitude, and her sad white hands looked as they had done in the first meeting at Tanford.

He left her, and returned in half an hour, everything being ready for departure.

He was careful to ride in the hotel coach, while she went to the station in a carriage in which he had placed her. He did not engage a chair for himself in the drawing-room car with her, but took a seat in another part of the train, from which he came only at intervals to ask if there were anything he could do for her.

The drive from Athol back to the heights where Tanford lay was different enough from that which they had taken over the same route in coming. Then, all had been fresh and alluring, and the lucid morning

had lent its spell of youthful grace to his fancies; but now the horses toiled for the most part up dusty steeps, and the weary heat of afternoon that beat upon the top of the stage burned the reality of his disgrace and weakness into Fenn's brain, with unremitting force. Yet he strove to maintain an air of simple friendliness with Anice, and when she spoke to him it was with a perceptible gentleness: he could see in her eyes that she was sorry for him, and had appreciated his attempt to make his presence unobtrusive during their return.

Meanwhile, after Mrs. Dadmun's friends had discovered Fenn's departure, and the chief of the corps herself had explained Mrs. Eulow's absence (which Ethel had not made known) by a timely call at the farm, there was a commotion among the Institute ladies. The matter was so much discussed, and had come to be talked of so openly, that Sharon Reeves, who by virtue of his cloth had been taken into confidence, resolved to counsel Fenn so soon as he could find an opportunity.

Ethel greeted her husband with a half-childish burst of joy. "Oh, I am so glad!" she cried, with sparkling eyes. "I was terribly nervous while you were away: I never felt so before. It seemed to me I could n't bear it, and this morning such a strange thing happened! I was reading in our room here, and something made me look up all at once, and for a minute I thought you were standing at the door, and saying good-by to me. You looked so pale!" Fenn turned his head half away; there was a stifling sensation in his throat. "You don't look well even now, Ben. You seem sad."

"I am tired," he said, kindly, feeling a weight like iron on his forehead. "But I shall soon be all right. It is you who need caring for, if you have begun seeing visions."

"No. All I need is you," said Ethel, with a kind of timid longing.

He pressed her to him; but, alas, he felt that the virtue had gone out of him. He knew that he loved her; he pitied her more than he did himself; but the warmth and

tenderness that had once been so abundant within him seemed to have dwindled away into obscure crevices of his being, like water-courses dried by the sun.

X.

The next day he spent entirely with Ethel. Every moment he exerted himself to please her; he rode with her in the afternoon, and the flush of a returning happiness stole into her face. But he scarcely noticed it; the ride had been tame and spiritless, compared with those in which Anice had been his companion; there was a hot restlessness in his heart. He was continually wondering what Mrs. Eulow's decision would be.

In the morning he found a note from her in the post-office, — the best way of getting it to him unnoticed. He went out to the old arbor from which he could see her roof, and opened the envelope there. There fell out of the note within two thin disks from the pod of the *lunaria*, or satin-flower, cultivated in old country-gardens. Wondering what it meant, he glanced at the letter, which contained but a few words. They were these: —

DEAR MR. FENN, — Bring your wife to see me soon. I have thought once more, as you asked me to, and am willing to believe that I was hasty. I shall put into this note something which I found in the garden to-day, which bears a meaning worth remembering. They are the last fragments left of a flower that blooms in early summer. You have seen others like them, in vases. When the bloom is gone and all the rest of the pod has fallen away this remains; and the old-fashioned name of the flower is Honesty, — Common Honesty. Sincerely,

ANICE EULOW.

Fenn let his hand fall, with the note in it, and gazed straight before him. Then he stooped and picked up the singular lustrous-fibred disks. His first thought was that no other woman could have met the emergency in so delicate yet trenchant a way; and his admiration for her was even heightened. For an instant following, the rebuke of the symbol she had sent cut him. But, after that, he began to be elated.

Reduced to plain terms, were not the decision and the note which it prompted in the nature of a victory for him? Was it wholly mercy that dictated them? In proportion as the supposed certainty that she loved him returned, his misery and remorse grew less. His mind retraced the Boston episode with a new elasticity, and he was not long in proving to his satisfaction that he had been exposed to a great temptation, and had come out of it unscathed; for, as a matter of fact, it had been the knowledge that Anice was for the time under his protection that restrained him, and not anything which she had said or done. Hence, it was clear that he had shown self-command: he could trust himself, and all could go on safely, as he had conceived that it might.

So when the Rev. Sharon Reeves met him, on his reëntering the hotel, and proposed a little secular expedition in search of fish, he accepted the idea with a good-humored contempt for it. Mr. Reeves seldom caught fish, and he scorned to buy them; but Fenn might go and catch them for him. It was agree-

able, also, to test his power of staying away from Anice for a while.

Ethel was glad to have him go. "Are you going to try the brook in Tom's Swamp?" she asked.

"Yes; but it 's no use going after trout till afternoon, and, besides, we can only get small ones at this season."

"That 's just the thing for Mr. Reeves," she laughed. "He 's so small himself that he can't manage a very big fish, I should say: at least, they seem to think so, and don't even give him the chance of trying."

They went, without waiting for afternoon; but when they had come to the neighborhood of the favorable pools and bends in the brook, Fenn repeated to the clergyman what he had said to Ethel about the season.

"Dear me," cried Reeves, "I never thought of that! I believe we have no right to take them now." He pulled from an inner pocket a narrow pamphlet containing the fish and game laws. "It 's so," he remarked, after scanning the pages. "It would be against the law. We ought to have gone

over to the mill for 'horn-paout,' as they call them here."

"A cast or two won't matter," answered Fenn; "and now that we have come so far, I must get something out of it." He approached the stream cautiously, and tossed his hook into a promising place.

The young clergyman looked on sadly. "It is a part of his inborn lawlessness," he said to himself, contemplating this breach of a legislative enactment.

Fenn found nothing in the spot where he had made his first cast, and as he drew away from the bank, in order to cut across and work noiselessly up to another bend, "I," said Reeves, "sha' n't fish."

"I dare say it is n't worth the trouble," Fenn agreed, halting.

"How long are you going to keep at it, then?" asked his companion, with a degree of solemnity.

"Oh, I don't know. If I once taste blood, I shall follow the thing up all day, very likely."

"But it 's against the law," reiterated the clerical sportsman, in a tone of rebuke.

"I know it, my dear fellow; but no one obeys that law until a little later. The inertia of freedom to fish can't be overcome at once, and I believe even the local fish commissioners allow themselves some latitude."

Reeves grounded his rod with an air of resolution. "Mr. Fenn," said he, "I have something I ought to say to you, and I think it might as well be said now."

"It seems from your manner," remarked the other, casually, "to be disagreeable. Is it?"

"Not necessarily, — that is, not altogether. To begin with, you must remember the obligations of my calling; and, in the second place, that I'm trying to do you a service."

"Well, I'm ready. Go ahead."

"There has been a great deal of unpleasant gossip about you at the hotel, for some time past," began Reeves, steadily.

"And do you think you will do me a service by repeating it?" Fenn inquired, not very well pleased. "Let me tell you in advance that I think that idea is one of the two or three radical errors by which the

human race has been so infernally warped out of happiness ; and that I don't care to hear a word of your gossip."

"It is n't mine," said the little man, gallantly sticking to his point. "It 's a great deal more yours, because your conduct has been sufficient cause for it."

"Hullo ! " cried Fenn, angrily ; "you wish to do me a service, and yet you have condemned me in advance, eh ? "

Mr. Sharon Reeves set his face sternly against the offender. "Yes," he retorted, "I do condemn " —

"That is reason enough for refusing to hear you," interrupted the chemist. "But even on general grounds I wish you to understand that I won't listen to a word of this tittle-tattle, whatever it is."

"I condemn the conduct of a man who exposes himself and his wife," Reeves proceeded, without heeding him, — "exposes himself and his wife to injurious criticism, by paying such extraordinary attentions to another lady as you have been doing to Mrs. Eulow."

By this time, Fenn was furious. "Mrs. Eulow," said he, "is an old friend of mine, whom it is presumption in you to mention in such a way. As to Mrs. Fenn and myself, we attend to our own affairs. You, sir, are an entire stranger; but as you invited me to come fishing, and have decided to give that up, I will now say good-morning."

Whereupon he strode off towards the stream, entirely forgetting the usual elaborate approaches of a trout-fisher.

Reeves stared after him for a moment, in honest distress; but, seeing that it was useless to go further, and reflecting that he had at least forced one point of his discourse upon him, he decided to retrace his steps, and seek his favorite saw-mill.

"It was an outrage," the chemist said to himself, when he turned his back. And as he trudged along mechanically through the alder-brake, now plunging into a wet hole among the tall grass, and sinking over his shoes; now forcing his way through a barrier of twigs, with his pole at a "carry," he muttered angrily: "Little jackanapes!"

"Simply because he wears a coat of a particular cut," and similar phrases. The fact that his relations with Anice Eulow had been made the theme of impertinent comment was new to him; for a full comprehension of what people are saying about us — thanks to the pleasant padding of self-esteem with which nature provides the most humble being — is the most difficult thing for us to grasp in daily life, always. When he had gone some distance, and had recovered the true fishing instinct, this fact began to thrust itself upon him more distinctly. It increased his indignation. Now that he was cooler, he was willing to admit that, although the Reverend Sharon had displayed a fatal want of tact, he had shown a praiseworthy conception of duty; and he was even willing to respect him, which he had never done till then. But the meddling attempt of idle people at the hotel to take charge of his welfare and his wife's galled him intolerably. He had but just got rid of the humiliation which had hung about him on the way back from Boston, and to have to contemplate this out-

side criticism revived it. He became defiant. He did not care what happened. Being convinced of his strength, he resolved that he would show it, expressly to discomfit the scandal-mongers to whom Reeves had alluded.

Two or three young trout took his bait, but he threw them back into the water. Midday came, and he went out to the road, where he succeeded in getting some milk and brown bread at one of the lost farmhouses he had so often noticed. The soft gloom of the woods, the wimpling brook, the swaying of grasses soothed him, and he returned to his sport with new zeal, securing towards evening a respectable string of dark, pink-spotted fish, with which he returned to the Institute in time to have them cooked for supper. He was willing to make amends for his sharpness towards Reeves by sending him some of the fried trout; but the clergyman's strict obedience to constituted authority forced him to decline the offering.

XI.

Little opportunity offered for Fenn to throw out challenges to his gossiping enemies by any new overt act of daring. He took Ethel with him in going to see Anice for the first time since their return, and the widow afterward avoided that free habit of wandering about in pairs which had previously been indulged in. There were driving parties, in which Mr. Evans — who had now got around to the autumnal topics of ensilage and winter feed for cattle — was included; and all the gazings at sunsets and other pastoral amusements of the place were carried on in groups. Kingsmill had not yet gone, and had come to look, by reason of his flannel shirts and the deeper tan on his face, increasingly piratical. Ethel had been scrupulous in letting him see almost nothing of her during the short time that her husband had been away; but Kingsmill was pleased

with the changed condition of things, because he perceived that she was much happier as a consequence of it. For some days everything went on peacefully, and without furnishing material for Mrs. Dadmun, who finally took her leave, with a conviction that she would not be needed for any terrible crisis.

But Fenn was still irritated and defiant; and it must be added that when the old confidence and safety seemed to have been restored to them Ethel became less pensive, less haunted by thoughts of a possible sacrifice, and their usual abrupt collisions of ideas began again.

They went with Mr. Evans and Anice, one Sunday evening, to the Orthodox church. A wave of warmer weather had reached these Massachusetts hills from the central furnace of the west, and the night had more of midsummer than of autumn in it. Fenn sat lazily observing the interior of the meeting-house, with its empty walls, its pews filled with a straggling congregation, among whom were young women of the neighborhood,

marked by a singular variation in degrees of style as to costume; and elder people, in all stages of weather-beaten vicissitude; with here and there a hearty farmer in his prime, and a few youths in uneasy black suits. The shuttered windows made dark spaces on the walls, in the dim light of a few oil-lamps; but the sashes being raised, the hot, unquiet chirring of the grass insects could be heard from without. Two long stove-pipes, black and bony, with numerous elbows, made their way on either side from the front wall of the church to the rear one, and suddenly dived into it near the pulpit, — as if the serpent of sin had been making plunges at the minister, and had been effectually trapped by accidentally sticking his fangs into the lath and plaster. On a table just below the pulpit were a few additional hand-lamps; and a very bent old man with a cane obtained one of them, which he carried back into the central body of the pews, where it irradiated his hymn-book and several ancient faces near his own with a ghastly shine. The whole scene struck Fenn as un-

necessarily dismal; and when the minister had risen and read out the first hymn, there was a long pause, no music being provided. At last the gray-haired preacher appealed from the silence.

"Will some one lead the tune?" he requested.

Another pause, worse than the first, ensued; but, just as Fenn was struggling to repress a desire to laugh, Anice's voice rose, easily and with measured volume, giving the quaint melody. Fenn was annoyed at his own boyish levity, and in a moment followed her with a clear but not very forcible baritone. Ethel joined, too; but from all around them there was heard an odd jangling of inharmonious notes, like the twanging of disordered piano-strings. There were a few good singers, nearly lost in the lagging mass of false tones. The old bent man with the lamp supplied a deep bass, which he exercised with bold originality. He avoided all the needless difficulties of counterpoint by striking at once the note next to the lowest in his register (if he had a register), and re-

maining steadily poised upon it, except when a whim of genius prompted him to descend for a moment to the note which was absolutely his lowest.

Notwithstanding these choral peculiarities, Fenn was exalted by the song. Anice's voice rose and fell without perturbation from the stumbling efforts of the congregation: it was full of peace, and though she carefully reserved its power it seemed to take the melody to itself involuntarily, gathering up all that was best in the chant from different parts of the room, and incorporating these strains with its own resonance. The bleak and sordid interior no longer obtruded itself on Fenn. The place settled itself into propriety before his eyes, under the influence of Anice's singing.

The preacher came to his sermon. He was a hard-headed, practical man, accustomed to the exactions of a shrewd farming population, and had a bargaining way of putting things to his hearers. He held his chin slightly forward, and nodded his head in a sharp manner when he made his chief points,

as if dickering. "He evidently thinks," was Fenn's inward commentary, "that if he is to make any of us sharers in the kingdom of heaven it must be done on close trading principles." It will be seen that he was not profoundly moved by the divine; and under the influence of the sermon, the meeting-house rapidly resumed its unbeautiful aspect, and the smell of kerosene from the lamps became painfully noticeable.

Once more that impression was removed, when another hymn was sung. This time the melody bore him away in thought to the church at Little Falls.

It was a strange thing that the voices of these three persons — Ethel, Anice, and Fenn — should be blended in a religious chant. It would have seemed still stranger, had it been known to those who heard them that Fenn was at that moment thinking of the time when he had sat with Anice and her father in another house of prayer, listening to the warm breeze in the horse-chestnuts; that time when he had been

strongly moved to place himself at her feet as a lover.

Another echo from that past! It swept over him with conquering sadness and unrest.

XII.

"We shall probably stay until some time in October," said Mr. Evans, as they walked along the street together, after the service. "But as Mr. Fenn says you return to town before many days, I propose to get up some special excursion or picnic, by way of 'closing the season.' What do you say?"

"It 's a charming idea!" cried Ethel. "Do you hear, Ben? It really seems so mournful, giving up this lazy out-door life, and going back to the driving city."

"What sort of thing had you in mind, father?" asked Mrs. Eulow.

"Well, what do you say to an afternoon tea at Temple Lake?"

There was a reactionary silence. This scheme was not strikingly novel. But Anice suddenly suggested, "And return by moonlight?" which met with prompt approval from Ethel and Fenn.

"The moon rises early now," said the chemist.

"I don't know about the wisdom of that," Mr. Evans rejoined, growing prudent. "I 'm afraid you will all catch colds." He was thinking it highly probable that he should catch cold himself.

But the moonshine having once got into the project could not be got out again, and he was compelled to submit.

Arrangements were made the next day, and as the moon would soon have changed its hour of rising, they determined to go that afternoon. The Pincotts, Kingsmill, Miss Ibbot and Miss Hamill, and a number of others were invited, making nearly twenty in all. Mr. Evans had copious hampers prepared, into which most of his remaining champagne was put, and there was much hurly-burly in effecting a distribution of the merry-makers among the several equipages. Kingsmill, Anice, and Fenn found it best that they should ride, but Ethel thought the trip too long for her to take in the saddle.

They started early, and the whole thing

passed off successfully. Some of the young men entered into an impromptu boat-race on the lake; then Pincott hastily organized a dramatic troupe, and gave a small charade entertainment under the trees, with costumes improvised from variegated wraps, and a curtain of thick-leaved boughs held up by his two boys between the trunks of two trees. And lastly they sat down by the lake-beach, lit some small fires on the sand, and sang in chorus, while the moon rose and gradually wrought a mysterious change on them and everything around them; so that it might have been imagined they were not the same people who had come from the Institute, but had imperceptibly altered into a more romantic sort, existing in a world of dusk-dimmed silver.

"I think we may as well start on," said Fenn to Anice, when they were all getting ready to go back. The carriages were being packed, and this process was tedious to the equestrians, whose horses were restive.

"Very well. Where is Mr. Kingsmill?"

"Here I am," said the heir, trotting up

from behind the carriages. "Some of them are going back by the other road, — around by the old tannery, you know. Would n't that be better?"

"It is much farther," objected Anice.

"Well, I must leave you, then. I promised them." Kingsmill moved away on his horse.

Anice had begun to follow.

"You will be tired out, if you go by that road," said Fenn, coming up beside her. "Let us go on." He thought she was reluctant for a moment; but in the next she turned Star's head without debate. Ethel was to drive with Mr. Evans: Fenn rode up and ascertained that they were coming by the usual road; then Anice and he set off.

Was that transformation of the moonlight something more than a fantasy? As they flew forward under the moon, with large stars waiting for them in advance, just above the sweep of the hills, Fenn was imbued with a kind of illusion that they had been released for the time being from their ordinary selves, and were gliding into some other phase less

sharply defined, and not hedged around with too many stubborn realities. Yet he thought of how soon he must cease to see Anice, and this lent a poignancy to the pleasure of the ride. It recalled him to himself, and quickened into more acute pain the dull heart-ache into which the wrath that followed Reeves's attack had soon subsided.

When they rode more slowly, they talked of the beauty of the night and of incidents at the picnic. The memories of both, however, were busy with that day when they had first ridden over this road; and, through the unseen agency that was always at work between them, each was aware that the other's thoughts were taking this direction.

"We are getting very far ahead of the rest," said Anice, as they ascended one of the many rises they had to traverse. "Let 's stop a moment and listen."

They reined in, and gazed back over the lower ground. The road was empty; the moonlight looked as if it had lain forever on the woods and passive earth, and as if it would never go away. Transient as it is,

there is more of eternity in this calm illumination than in the swift and stimulating light of the sun. Fenn thought, "What if we two were to be stricken by some lasting change, here in this pale light, and kept together forever in it, — dead, or mute and blind, — yet conscious of our companionship!" It was an unearthly fancy, but his heart throbbed warmly and fiercely under it. He felt an insatiable desire for some isolating fate which should separate them from everybody else. Yet there was a something within him that remonstrated against this desire: for an instant, he even felt the despair of a drowning man, and struggled within himself for something to hold by and keep himself from being drawn under. In vain!

Such silence was in the air that they could hear the whistle of a locomotive at some great distance, — so far that it was hardly louder than the coo of a bird. But nearer and slighter sounds from the road they had been traveling, as is sometimes the case, did not reach them.

"It is strange," said Fenn, in a dry tone

that gave no hint of what was going on in his mind, "that we don't hear them coming."

"Very," said Anice. "How fresh and sweet it is here!"

Their voices sounded cold, in the moonlight.

"Ah, what was that? Is n't it the carriages?"

A faint rumbling of the vehicles could be detected. "Yes; that 's they at last," assented Fenn, and immediately touched his horse.

They did not wait again, and when they entered the village they were far in advance. As they came up the hill to the junction of roads which formed an irregular common among the houses, some men moving across this space, with their legs very black against the moonlight, presented a queer appearance.

"Up so far above us, they look like insects crawling on the top of the hill," Fenn observed; and Anice laughed. They tried

to put themselves at ease, with trifles of this sort.

He accompanied her at a light trot to the farm-house, where Star was housed by the man, and Fenn's gray hitched in the barn. "I shall wait here," Fenn had explained, "until Mr. Evans comes. I don't like to leave you quite alone."

"Let us go around into the garden, then," said Anice. "There are some seats, and it will be pleasanter there." She was nervous at being thus thrown passively alone with him, and fancied that going into the house would increase her constraint.

The garden lay in an angle between the house and the bank formed by the cutting of the hillside. There were trees here and there; among them one that was dead; and their shadows fell with soft abundance on the brightly flooded paths and beds.

"This is where you found those flower-pods that you sent me?" he asked. It was the first allusion he had made to them.

"Yes," she replied, her voice coming much fainter than she wished. She would have

offered some remark to divert him, but her wit failed her.

Fenn stopped abruptly. They were under the shadow of the dead tree.

"I cannot be bound by that symbol," he declared, with resistless impetuosity. "I have thrown those skeletons of flowers away, for my honesty is more than a common one; and before I go I must speak." She drew back, terrified; but he went on, crying, "No, no! Anice — Anice! — don't judge me as you would other men. There is some fate upon me; I don't know what; I cannot resist it. Oh, I have tried! But the passion that was beginning and never had free play, when I knew you so long ago, has come again, and will not be stifled. I love you, Anice! You cannot tell me of faiths and duties. I only know this one thing, and it is truer than all others."

"This is cowardly," she gasped, when she could. "It is unworthy of you."

"No, it is not cowardly," he answered, pale and determined. "It is braver than to keep a lying face. Have you not seen, have we

not both known for weeks what was growing up around us? And is it better to part, with that knowledge smouldering in us, than to face it and speak of it faithfully?"

She collected all her force, and said coldly, "If you knew this, you should have gone away long ago, never to see me on earth again. And will you tell me what you think is to be gained by declaring to me now a love that dishonors us all? It is a sin against yourself, and an unpardonable wrong to me."

He looked at her in rigid silence. "You may deceive yourself," he said; "but you cannot me. You know well, — very well, — the power you have had over me. I fancied it was a thing that could be turned into some new kind of devotion, like that we talked of. But you saw how it was overcoming me, and you forbade me to see you again. Why do you accuse me, when you had it all in your hands, and allowed our acquaintance to continue?"

"Because I trusted you and wished you well," Anice returned, with less firmness. Then, seeing that the only hope was in an

immediate parting, she added, "I shall not leave this garden, Mr. Fenn. It is for you to go!" She pointed commandingly towards the entrance by which they had come in.

For an instant, all his strength forsook him. Then he burst into a fierce, broken laugh.

"I understand at last," he said, with a bitter intensity she had never even dreamed of. "You have taken a terrific and skillful vengeance. Out of resentment for a clumsy, boyish mistake, you have deliberately ruined a man's heart, and made him put his honor in the dust before you. Yes, I 'll go." He turned, so dizzy that he could hardly see the path, and began to move away.

There was a moment of passionate effort on her part to repress the storm within herself; but as she beheld him receding she yielded, and made a detaining gesture. He saw it, and came back rapidly.

"Am I wrong?" he cried, searching her face. "You felt more than that; you — you loved! Tell me it was so."

She tried to steady herself by putting her

hands out into the air. Then she gasped, "No — no!"

"You did not?" he repeated.

But she could no longer reply. She was on the point of falling; and with an instinct of protection he stretched out his arms, almost enfolding her in them. As they stood thus for an instant, the shadow of the dead tree lay motionless upon them, and the icy moonlight around gave visible bounds to that isolation for which he had so lately wished.

She had confessed nothing; but at that instant Fenn felt that all had been confessed between them. He saw, with a pity that wrung his heart, what her struggle had been; and remorse struck through him like a sword, for his own sin against Ethel, and for the attitude into which he had forced this woman who stood with him here. Was this the joy of liberation he had looked forward to?

Anice recovered herself, at once. She drew away from his contact, and held on to the bench near at hand. "This will kill me!" she was moaning, like one only half conscious. "All these years — No; oh, no! You must

leave me instantly. For Ethel's sake go; go! Tell her all you have said, — everything."

"Thank God, Anice, you are nobler than I!" Uttering these words with lips that seemed chilled by a frost, he fled.

XIII.

Up the bank and through the fields saturated with a cold dew, he hurried, flying and stumbling, forgetting the horse he had left tied in the barn; and only when he reached the old arbor, with its early-flaming woodbines looking ashen in the light of the moon, he paused, and strove to collect his senses.

When he came into the hotel, those who saw him wondered at the breathless and exhausted appearance about his face, ordinarily so strong and composed and glowing with healthy color; but they attributed it to anxiety, for his first words were an inquiry about his wife.

"No, she has n't come back," answered one of the ladies of the lake party, who had returned, as he stood with his hand on the stair-rail, about to go up and look for her in their room.

"That 's strange. What road did you come by, — the tannery?" he asked her.

"No; the usual one."

"And you did n't see her, driving with Mr. Evans?"

"No. They were behind us, I think."

Fenn went on into the empty sitting-room, where the over-fatigued piano stood, with its cover thrown back as usual, and exposing the perpetual grin of its white keys. He was at a loss to understand Ethel's failure to arrive. Time enough had passed, he thought, for them to make up the distance by which Anice and he had outstripped them, and Mr. Evans would naturally bring Ethel to the Institute, first.

Some newspapers were lying on a side-table, and he picked up one, thinking to allay his feverishness and divert a growing anxiety about his wife. The first paragraph that took his notice was one which recorded with business-like vigor the pursuit and arrest of a man who had abandoned his wife and attempted an elopement. He threw the sheet down in disgust. "Great heaven, what have I not been saved from!" he muttered, as he went out. He knew, from the shock of

remorse that had pierced him there in the garden, what a frightful deception he had subjected himself to. He had not intended, at the worst, to do what this man in the newspaper was guilty of; his original plan of flight, which he had been on the point of broaching to-night, had conformed to a species of propriety. Anice and he were to disappear separately; they were to wait till he could obtain a release from his legal ties; or, he had even said to himself that if he could only offer her his devotion unrestrain edly and live near her, seeing her every day, no other step should be taken. But now all this plausible refinement settled down, in his view, to the vulgar level of the criminal he had just read about. His limbs shook with the horror in which he held himself, at recognizing what he had been drifting to. He wished that he might be torn in pieces, annihilated. But he saw that his punishment was worse than that: it lay in continuing to breathe and being forced to contemplate himself.

One of the young men sitting in the colon-

nade suggested that perhaps Mr. Evans had changed his mind after starting, and had turned off on to the tannery road. This afforded Fenn a slight relief; but he went on pacing up and down, his mind busy with possible catastrophes, — an attack by tramps, a runaway, a broken bridge, or something else that he could not imagine. It occurred to him to go back for his horse and ride out along the regular road, to meet the belated team; but the bare possibility that Mr. Evans might have taken the other route overruled this plan. He had come to the point when to have Ethel arrive while he should be out searching for her would be an additional distress, of which he did not want to run the risk. By a considerable effort, however, he decided to go over to Pincott's, and ask questions there.

"Oh, they *must* have gone the other way," the artist's wife said, confidently. "Don't look so worried, Mr. Fenn. I don't believe anything has happened."

He thanked her, and went back to the hotel, saying that it was very likely she was

there even now. But she had not come. It was growing late, and the boarders who had not retired gave all their attention to the source of his alarm.

"Miss Hamill has just gone up-stairs," the same young man informed him who had before offered a hint. "She came by the tannery, and says Mr. Kingsmill left them, and trotted back to join Mr. Evans's carriage; and *he* has n't come back yet. So it must be all right."

"Oh," said Fenn, with an air of being obliged. But the news excited still more apprehension in his mind.

Thinking that he was giving his nervousness too much prominence, he went out into the road, and walked quickly towards the point where the carriage must enter the village if it had not followed in the course he had taken with Anice. Kingsmill's absence filled him with a sickening dream of what his condition might have been if this rich young man had drawn Ethel into any such insane bewilderment as that in which he himself had so lately stood with Anice. For-

tunately, that had not happened, and Mr. Evans's being with Ethel prevented his conjuring up any phantasm of jealousy; but he felt a vague, unreasoning anger against Kingsmill for being away with Ethel at this crisis.

He stood still in the street, and noticed all at once that the moonlight had nearly waned, — the weird illumination which, an hour or two before, had seemed so permanent. It gave him a bitter satisfaction to think how his madness had crumbled and slipped away with it. A huge field of cloud was rising, and had swallowed half the stars.

"Oh, my God! If I should never see Ethel again! What if some accident has happened, from which she will die?"

This was the cry in his heart.

A horse and rider, springing out of the feeble light a little way off, and dashing by, roused him. It had been but a flash, but the face of Kingsmill seemed to be printed on the night air, and to be lingering behind like a vision, while the rider swept on.

Fenn ran after him towards the hotel, at

his greatest speed. The young man was there already, dismounted, quivering with excitement, and talking to a little dusky group of men.

"What is it?" cried Fenn, with an awful fear, as the others fell back before him.

"There has been an accident," said Kingsmill, rapidly.

"Where? Tell me where?"

"The railroad crossing" —

"Is she killed?" The words burst from Fenn like the red drops that spurt from a knife-thrust.

"She was not badly hurt," said Kingsmill. "The cars struck them just as they had got over, and they were thrown out. But some people are taking care of them."

"I must go!" cried Fenn wildly, rushing to get Kingsmill's horse, which was being led away.

"Not that one!" exclaimed the owner. "I have a fresh one in the stable."

There was a sharp scurry to saddle the fresh steed, and just as Fenn put his foot in the stirrup the farmer from Mr. Evans's

came up with the tired gray and a message from Anice, who had also become alarmed.

"For God's sake, go and tell her, Kingsmill!" shouted Fenn, mounting.

The next instant his horse had shot away, under spur, for the tannery road.

. . . . .

It was a solemn group that wound up the highway from the railroad crossing, coming back.

By the time the wagon that had been obtained was ready to start, Anice, also, had arrived on horseback; and the two mounted figures moved at a funereal pace beside the cart. Ethel had fainted at first, but was restored; and, unless she had suffered internal hurt, was judged to be the worse only for a few bruises. Mr. Evans had not come off so well. He had a broken arm, and was prostrated by the shock he had sustained. His light carriage was left behind, a partial wreck, and the borrowed wagon had to proceed slowly, in order to avoid possible injury to the sufferer.

Fenn and Anice did not exchange a word,

but both were lost in wonder at the chance that had thus brought them together again on this same night, under such altered conditions. From time to time Fenn, bringing his horse close to the wheels on Ethel's side, spoke some low word of inquiry or soothing, as indistinguishable to any but her ear as the murmur of the night breeze in the pines. Sometimes, when he fell back and watched the muffled forms reclining in the wagon, a picture presented itself to him in which he saw Ethel as she might have been, motionless and darkly covered and insensible to the jolting of the springs, — a picture of the dead being brought home silently from the place of her death; and then he would turn away and curse himself, in the midst of a mute thanksgiving.

The chemist sat by his wife all night and watched, while she slept, after many vain attempts. In the morning, the physician who had been telegraphed for from a distance arrived, and pronounced with some confidence that she had no unseen injuries.

It was late in the afternoon that Fenn

knelt by his wife's bed, while a soft light from the fading west pervaded the room. Seeing that she was strong and recovered, he spoke: "Ethel, I cannot put off any longer the confession I must make of the wrong that has been in my heart these last few weeks."

"I have been afraid," she answered calmly. "Oh, yes, I knew;" and the tears rose in her eyes. "But I must not hear it. I cannot."

The blood mounted to his face. "How despicable I am!" he groaned. "But you don't know all, Ethel. You cannot know that I told her" —

She covered her face with her hands, crying, "Oh, why must I believe this! Why can't I forget it all, pretend that I did not see?" Then, with a hot beating in her temples, she took away her hands, and said with forced deliberation, "Never tell me any more. I cannot promise to be the same to you or to hold you so; but I will hear nothing. Only tell me, — did you mean to do me a wrong? Are you true to me?"

"The wrong," he replied, "was a madness, an infatuation. That was all. But I am not fit, now, even to say I am true to you." He lifted his eyes to hers.

She looked into them with a calm, just scrutiny; and Fenn thought that he knew what the light in the recording angel's eyes must be like. But it was only the glance of a tender woman possessing deep intuitions. She said at length: "I will believe in you."

Ethel put her hand upon his head, with a touch so simple and gentle that it was the best of benedictions.

He had held, once, that there was a peculiar mystery about Anice, and the belief had made her the more dangerously fascinating. Ethel was transparent enough, exteriorly; but the mystery of her nature lay deeper down, and he was only just beginning to apprehend it. The quality in Anice served merely as a unit of measure for its larger presence in Ethel. Kneeling here before his wife, with too much humility in him even to put his lips to hers, Fenn saw that he was touching the mystery which is profounder than intellectual

choice; which diffuses itself through earth and heaven, and solves all but explains nothing, — pure love.

They went on living. That is generally the way with people.

If we were constructing an ideal drama from their lives, it might be said that Fenn's punishment was too light; but we do not altogether know what that punishment was. Fenn and Ethel grew better, though I will not say happier. For, in opposition to formal moralists, I maintain that people are often less happy as they grow better. Something, indeed, had gone from their lives, which would never come again; but Ethel's great love and generosity restored Fenn's self-respect as far as anything could restore it. The highest that remained to him was so to live every day as to become worthier of her love.

Three years after the summer at Tanford, when he had prospered and become part owner in some profitable chemical works, Ethel and Fenn, being in New York, un-

expectedly encountered Mrs. Eulow at a crowded evening reception.

"Does she sing as beautifully as ever?" Mrs. Fenn asked their hostess.

"*More* beautifully than ever, I believe," was the answer. "But she can never be induced to let us hear her; at least, not in companies. There are a few ladies to whom she has sung, and she will take part in a charity concert very rarely. But if you want to hear her, you must go to some of the homes for poor children. She has regular days which she gives to them, and there she will pour out her voice for an hour or two at a time."

"How singular!"

"Yes, it is very eccentric. But since her father died she spends more of her time here, and has been devoted to good works. She has entered into benefaction as a sort of career, I fancy. Some of us predicted, when she began, that she would be a failure, — she was not the sort of person. But we were wrong. She seems to be completely in earnest, and does a great deal of good."

When Fenn heard this, he remembered what had been said by Anice so long ago, — that she wanted him to put purpose into her life, and that to have a career she must make a sacrifice. Her sacrifice had been the relinquishing of her destructive power over him. Her purpose? It gave him a very strange feeling to reflect that in this, too, he had aided, without his will; for her devotion to merciful deeds certainly implied a memory of him which shut out for her any further seeking after personal happiness.

He stood a little way from Ethel, and when Mrs. Eulow came by, simply dressed in black, she bowed to him in passing. In her eyes there was a light of conquest, but it was of conquest over herself. To Ethel, also, she bowed. "I am just going," she said, with a slight quivering in the tone, and the glance with which she accompanied this was one of melancholy and appeal; yet it was trustful. Ethel saw in it something which meant, "You at least are a woman who can forgive a woman, and you understand me."

Then, as the figure in black turned away, Ethel responded gravely and sweetly, in a way that satisfied the widow's appeal: "Good-by!"

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